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In this issue there is a notable diversity in the topics discussed, together with a decided emphasis on matters of direct interest to us as South Africans. Despite or perhaps because of the obvious importance of humane criticism in our local context, we are happy to be reminded as well that our immediate concerns should not cause us to forget the larger view, and the quest for the holy grail.

THE EDITORS

ASPECTS OF THE *ISANGOMA*[1] IN THE POETRY OF B.W. VILAKAZI*

by ADRIAN KOOPMAN

Benedict Wallet Vilakazi was born at Groutville Mission, Natal, in 1906. Both his parents were devout Christians, members of the Congregationalist Protestant church. In 1918 Vilakazi was sent to St Francis College at Mariannhill, where he both embraced the Catholic faith and in 1922 qualified as a teacher. Between 1922 and 1935 he taught at various schools around Natal, and in 1934 he obtained a B.A. from UNISA with distinction in Zulu. In 1935 he was appointed to the Department of Bantu Languages at Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg where he stayed until his untimely death in 1947. In 1936 he obtained his B.A. Honours, and in 1938 an M.A. with the thesis 'The Conception and Development of Poetry in Zulu'. In 1946 he was awarded a D.Litt. for his thesis 'The Oral and Written Literature in Nguni'.

During his life he published three novels, *Nje Nempela* in 1933, *Noma Nini* in 1935, and *UDingiswayo kaJobe* in 1939; and at the time of his death he was working with Professor C.M. Doke on a Zulu-English Dictionary. Although Vilakazi has a reputation as a novelist and an academic, he is probably best known for his poetry. His first collection, *Inkondlo kaZulu* ('Zulu Songs'), was published in 1935 and this was followed in 1945 with *Amal' eZulu* ('Zulu Horizons'). These two collections form the material for the study of certain aspects of Vilakazi's poetry in this paper, and they should be read against the background of his life as sketched above, with its emphasis on the Christian, Westernised, and academic way of life.

Vilakazi's poetry falls naturally into four main groups according to theme. The order is roughly chronological: (1) his early 'Romantic' poetry; (2) the latter 'inspirational' poetry; (3) his final 'Black Consciousness' period; and (4) scattered works on historical subjects, heroic and epic in character. This paper is particularly concerned with Vilakazi's 'Romantic' and 'inspirational' poetry.

The early period is based on the work of the English Romantic poets, particularly Shelley, Keats, and Wordsworth, with Vilakazi borrowing style as well as content, mixing English idiom with Zulu idom. So in his 'Inqomfi' ('The Lark'), we have a curious mixture of Shelley's 'Ode to a Skylark', Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale', and images from Zulu culture: the goddess Diana

* First presented as a paper to the Southern African Studies Seminar at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, in August 1979.

stands with the Bushmen; the bird sings with the grace and beauty of Schubert and Chopin, Caluza and Cele[2]. Vilakazi's 'We Moya!' ('Oh Wind!') is clearly based on Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind', and his 'Ukhamba lukaSonkomose' ('The Claypot of Sonkomose') has distinct echoes of Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'. Although the poems belonging to this period are frequently muddled and confusing, there emerges from them a picture of a man seeking in nature an escape from the pressures of society, and seeking too, an answer to the question 'Who am I?'. Such a search for identity is typical of all Vilakazi's poetry.

Significant to the *isangoma* theme of this paper is the Romantic 'death wish', expressed for example in the last stanza of 'We Moya!':

> We moya! Leth' ukukhanya
> Kwenhliziyo yami . . .
> Ngife kanye nawe kanye.
>
> O Wind! Bring light
> To my heart . . .
> So that I might die together with you.

In these poems death is seen as a refuge, as in the last stanza of 'Ma Ngificwa Ukufa' ('When I am overcome by death'):

> Ngimbeleni endawen' enjena:
> Laph' izinsungulo . . .
> Zenkathazo zingenakuthola
> Sango lokwahlukanis' umhlaba,
> Zingivus' ebuthongweni obuhle.
>
> Bury me in a place like that:
> There where the worms . . .
> Of worries are unable to find
> A gateway to enter into the earth
> And wake me from a beautiful sleep.

ignificant too, in the Romantic poems, are the images of drugs and medicines, of drunken and drugged states, to express states of poetic inspiration. So in stanza 2 of 'Cula Ngizwe' ('Sing that I might hear'):

> Mangibe njengophoswe ngekhubalo
> Bese ngilala phezu kwengalo
> Ngizunywe buthongo.

Let me become like one bewitched by potents
And then I will lie on my arm,
Overcome by sleep.

The 'inspirational' poems continue with the questions 'Who am I?' and 'Where am I?' but instead of looking for the answer in nature, Vilakazi examines aspects of the Zulu past and his cultural heritage. In these poems he seeks not only to discover himself as a Zulu, but to find out what it is that inspires him to write poetry. So in 'Ngizw' Ingoma' ('I hear a song'), he recalls hearing the songs of the Venda people when he was a child, and he says of them 'ningisus' usinga, ngivukwe yikhambi' ('You inspire me, I am aroused [as if] by charms'). 'Ithongo Lokwazi' ('The Spirit of Knowledge') addresses the ancestors of the Zulus, and asks for knowledge of tribal history to be passed on to Vilakazi, together with the skill of writing, so that he in turn may pass on this skill to those who are still to come. 'UGqozi' ('The Power of Inspiration') relates a dream of visiting Shaka's old kraal at Dukuza and meeting Shaka's aunt Mnkabayi. Significant in this poem is the concept of a burden being laid upon him to write:

Vuka wena kaMancinza!
Kawuzalelwanga ukulal 'ubuthongo.
Vuk 'ubong' indaba yemikhonto
Nank 'umthwal' engakwethwesa wona.

Awake, you of Mancinza!
You were not born to lie in sleep.
Rise and praise matters of war
Here is the burden which I give you.

In 'Imbongi' ('The Bard'), he thanks an unknown *imbongi* for having given him inspiration to write poetry. He says that the true *imbongi* is 'sent his tongue' by the ancestral spirits. Vilakazi then wonders where his own powers of poetry come from:

Konje ngabe yim' engikhulumayo,
Noma ngabe nguwe Thongo likaMbongi?

By the way, could it be I myself who is
Speaking, or could it be you Spirit of Mbongi?

In the inspirational poems Vilakazi questions himself as to why he writes poetry. The answer, expressed generally in the majority of these poems, seems to be that firstly, it is his duty to write for his fellow men, and secondly, this duty as well as the skill of writ-

ing has been given to him by his ancestral spirits. Both of these aspects are germane to the occurrence of *isangoma* imagery in his later poetry, as we shall see. The images of charms and medicines, of being drunk or drugged, to indicate process and state of inspiration, are frequent in these poems. More relevant, however, is the ever-increasing reference to the ancestral spirits, and we find that this period of his poetry is characterized by open communication with the *amadlozi*[3]: questioning them, addressing them, and most frequently, appealing to them. This is particularly significant in the light of his Christian upbringing and education, and it reveals a slow but continual change in Vilakazi as he opens his mind to the true 'ubuZulu' of his heritage.

The two themes of inspiration in nature and inspiration in Zulu heritage are brought together in the poem 'KwaDedangendlale' ('In the Valley of a Thousand Hills'). This is a reminiscent poem, written while Vilakazi was at Witwatersrand University and recalling that part of his boyhood while he was at school at Inchanga. The description of the scene is at once more polished and more lyrical than his early nature poetry, and Vilakazi sees echoes of himself in the natural splendour of the area:

Imikhambathi yakhona
Nasebusika iyathela . . .
. . . Yebo, nami ngiyothela
Ngigcwal' amajikijolo,
Ngiyethe njengamasundu
Agcwele izihlekehleke, . . .

The acacias of hereabouts
Even in winter they bear fruit . . .
. . . Yes, I too will bear fruit
Fill up with berries,
And I will droop over like the palms
Filled with their bunches of fruit, . . .

Filled with this resolve, he stands upright and strong, and so likens himself to the mountains and hills.

A new note in this poem is the role played by the *amadlozi.* Vilakazi sees the scene not only as an area of natural splendour, but as an area belonging to the Zulu people and thus linked with their history. Beneath that land, beneath those hills, lie the spirits of the departed, and Vilakazi is very aware of the link between his Zulu roots and the area that he is looking at. He appeals to the ancestors to ensure that he is always in such a place where he can be reminded of his heritage, and of his task of recording and interpreting this heritage for others.

But it is not just the combination of themes, and the new way of looking at nature, which make this poem important to this paper. Particularly significant are stanzas 13, 14 and 15, where Vilakazi has a dream, a vision, perhaps even an hallucination, where he wanders off into the forests of the valley, at night. On this surrealistic ramble he is confused and lost:

Ngidakwa yilezizintaba
Ngilahleka ngingatholwa
Ngidakwe ngaphuphutheka
Ngaze ngaficwa yinkungu.

I am made drunk by these hills
I am irretrievably lost
I am drunk and befuddled
And eventually I was overcome by mist.

As he goes deeper into the valley, exotic flowers — arums and waterlilies — float into his senses and then out. Strange baboons appear suddenly, and startle him by barking. He listens to the birds calling to each other, and converses with a night-jar. It is worthwhile quoting stanza 15 in full:

Ngabon' uzavol' engikha,
Ngasengel' abantabakhe.
Ngalala phansi kwenyanga
Ngibelethwe ngumhlabathi;
Isiphuku kungutshani,
Ngacamel' esiqundwini.
Ngashayana nengqimpothwe
Ngibukela izinkanyezi
Ziphuma zishon' enzansi.
Nomthal' uguquka nezwe.

I saw the night-jar appreciating me,
And I milked for its children.[4]
I lay beneath the moon
Borne by the earth;
My blanket was of grass,
My pillow a tuft of grass.
[However] I restlessly turned
Looking at the stars
Coming up, and going down in the South,
And the Milky Way turning in relationship to the earth.

Of note here is the sense of intimacy with the animals and birds, with the forces of nature. Particularly noteworthy is the intimacy

with the earth in lines 4–6, and the use of the word *beletha* suggests not only an intimacy with the earth but with those below it, the *abaphansi,* or ancestral spirits. It is worth remarking on his feeling of restlessness which is mirrored by the images of cosmic restlessness, with the stars turning and the Milky Way revolving. But perhaps the most remarkable aspect of this three-stanza vision is that the poet sees himself out walking, without purpose, *and at night.*[5] To explain this curious behaviour, we must turn to Vilakazi's final and greatest poem, 'UMamina'.

The name *UMamina* literally means 'a feminisation of myself', and it is this poem, more than any other, which gives us an insight into Vilakazi's personal and private world. Mamina is the name which Vilakazi gives to the beautiful young maiden who dominates the poem, and the basic 'plot', as it were, of the poem details his relationship with her. The poem abounds with descriptions of the girl's charms. She walks with a graceful swaying motion in stanza 7:

Ngiyawubon' umzimba wakh' usuluza
Njengohlanga ludlaliswa amanzu,

I see your body swaying
Like a reed played with by water,

Nekhand' elincane elintamo
Njengembumbulu yemamba yehlathi

And the small head on the [long] neck
Like a large mamba of the forest

Mamina's beauty is likened by Vilakazi to that of the girls of Nongoma, of whom it is said that they are so beautiful that they cannot have been born of mortals:

Ungikhumbuza phansi kwaNongoma
Laph' izintombi zingazalwanga
Ziqhibuka phansi njengamakhowe.

You remind me of down at Nongoma
Where the girls are not born
[But] they spring from the ground like mushrooms.

She is so beautiful that when he looks at her, his knees turn to jelly:

Wangibuk' ntomb' enzimakazi
Ngajiyelw' ukuba ngiyoshonaphi,
Kwaxeg' amadolo zaw' izikhali, . . .

You looked at me, O dark-skinned beauty
I was confused as to where I should go,
The knees shook and the weapons fell, . . .

It is clear throughout the poem that Vilakazi is much in love with this young maiden, and in stanza 10 she is idealised to the status of a goddess:

NoNomkhubulwan' ukuzwile
Ngephunga lamakh' elikulandelayo,
Wakwengula ngesiphuku sakhe,
Wakulandela wakulondela mina.

Even Nomkhubulwane[6] has sensed you
By the scent of the fragrance which follows you
She has skimmed you off with her kaross,
And, following you, has protected you for me.

Nowhere is this idealisation, and his consequent subservience, better expressed than in stanza 17, where he says:

Ngikutshath' emhlane wezimbabala,
Ngikukhethel' ezizibhelumhlophe,
Ngathi emnqoka ngabek' unkonka.
Ngikuhlalisil' esihlibhini sengca,
Ngaseluka ngomhlanga uphicwe nembubu,
Ngakushiya nokhamba luqhilik' amasi,
Ngagqizis' izinyawo zakho ngovovo.

And I put you on the back of bush-buck does,
Selecting for you the white-tailed ones,
And in front I placed a male bush-buck.
I seated you on a sledge of grass,
I wove it from reeds interlaced with soft grass,
And I left you with a pot overflowing with 'maas',
And I put on your feet anklets of red aloe.

The following stanza continues this idea:

Ngikuqhululele amaviyo neziphofu,
Ngakhamel' emlonyeni wakho uju
Lwamabhonsi namabhicongo,

And I threw out for you the medlar and the loquat,
And I squeezed into your mouth the juice
Of the other wild fruits,[7]

The relationship between Vilakazi and Mamina is a curious one: they are very close, and very intimate, and yet at the same time he cannot find her: *vide* stanzas 5 and 6:

> Uyinkosikazi yenhliziyo yami wedwa,
> Uwedwa ekujuleni komphefumalo
> Wam' okungaziwa;
>
> You alone are the [one] woman of my heart,
> You are alone in the depths of my soul
> Which are not known;
>
> Uphi uMamina?
> Ngiyakucinga ngikuphuthaza,
> Izandla zami zibamb' moya nobala.
> Unjengesiboshwa, ukinathelwa' enhliziweni
> Yomphefumulo wam' ongathi nyiki.
> Unyakaza ngikuzwe, uphefumule ngizwe.
>
> Where are you Mamina?
> I search and grope for you,
> My hands grasp the air, but — nothing [but in vain].
> You are like a prisoner, tied in the heart
> Of my soul and not moving.
> [As] you move I feel you, and [when] you breathe I hear you.

This apparent paradox is repeated throughout the poem, and is significant when we come to examine the aspects of the *isangoma*.

We have looked at the poem 'uMamina' in sufficient detail to gain a general impression of the relationship between Mamina and Vilakazi, but we must still ask, 'Who is this woman? What does she mean to Vilakazi? How does she tie in with his earlier poetry, indeed, his poetry as a whole?' If we think in terms of Vilakazi's Romantic poetry, and his Western 'classical' upbringing, the obvious interpretation is to regard Mamina as his personal muse of poetry. Her attractiveness, her elevation to goddess status in Vilakazi's mind, her singing and playing on the flute, and particularly her effect on him as a poet — all these enhance this interpretation. In stanza 12 of this poem, Vilakazi, returning to his earlier imagery of drunkenness or druggedness, shows the effect of this 'Mamina-inspiration':

> Hiya Mamina,
> Ngizozula ngibuye ngithini
> Ngoba ngivukwa yikhamb' okohlanya.

Ngihlanya ngihamba ngingenabhungane,
Ngihawula ihungulo lamangwe,
Ngidakwa yimunyamunyan' okwenyoni.
Manje ngishay' inkondlo, . . .

Hey Mamina,
I will wander around and then say what?
Because I have been aroused by charms like a madman.
I act madly [although] I go about without a beetle,
I am hypnotised by the charms of the 'amangwe' bush,
And I am made drunk by the dagga plant like a bird.
And so now I sing my song , . . .

Stanza 22 repeats this link between Mamina and poetic creation even more graphically:

Ngiphenduke ngelul' isandla,
Ngikulolong' emagxalabeni.
Ngizw' ikhambi lingen' ekhanda,
Lingiphethul' ingqondo ngibamb' usiba,
Kanti sekuyilapho ngihay' inkondlo, . . .

I turn and stretch out my hand,
And stroke you on the shoulders.
And I feel inspiration entering my head,
It arouses my mind and I catch hold of a pen,
And it is here that I sing my song, . . .

A satisfactory interpretation, then, and one well supported from the text, is to regard Mamina as Vilakazi's personal muse. But the portrayal of inspiration in the poem often takes very curious forms. Let us examine a few extracts:

Ngangenwa ngumunyu okwesilokazana . . .
The grief of sobbing entered me . . .
(Stanza 11)

Ungenza ngilunywe ngamatekenya,
Ngibhedle njalo ngingahlali ngithule.

You make me as if bitten by small sores on the feet,
I continually fidget, and cannot sit still and be quiet.
(Stanza 16)

Woza siyozicoshel' umsobo nowowoza.
Lokhu yikhona kudla kwamathongo, . . .

Come, we will pick ourselves soft green herbs.[9]
Those which are the food of the ancestral spirits, . . .
(Stanza 29).

Images of wandering around at night occur frequently in this poem. In stanza 4, this is just before dawn.

Ngibuzwa bunkwela, kukhala' udwani.
Lukubingelela mntanenkosi, . . .

I feel the dawn coming, the grass-blade cries,
Greeting you, my princess, . . .

In stanza 13, again, he sings just before dawn:

Manje ngishay' inkondlo, . . .
. . . Yengam' ilanga liphume, . . .

And now I sing my song . . .
. . . It overlooks the rising sun, . . .

Stanza 20 echoes the earlier reference to 'night-walking' in "Kwa-Dedangendlale":

Yebo, Mamina, ngililandel' igekle
Liyilokhu lishilo phansi kwamathunzi
Okuswelela kwehlobo . . .
. . . Wangilandela ngezwa kuvum' umabhengwane . . .
. . . Nami ngayilalela ingoma yakho,
Ngayibhanqa nekazavolo
Esengel 'abantabakhe ngokuhlwa, . . .

Yes, Mamina, I followed the whistle, . . .
That one which called beneath the shadows
Of the summer dusk . . .
. . . You followed me and I heard the owl agree . . .
. . . And I too listened to your song,
I likened it to the call of the night-jar
Which milks for its children at dusk, . . .

It is curious that Mamina is seen not only as the one who calls Vilakazi to walk in darkness, but even as the cause of darkness, with the power to remove it if necessary, as shown in stanza 19:

Ngezwa ngomnyama ungithi gumbeqe.
Keph' izinkanyezi zamehl' akho
Ziwuphebezil' umnyama kwasa, . . .

> And I felt the darkness as you closed over me.
> But the stars of your eyes
> Removed the darkness and it became light, . . .
> (lit.: 'It dawned')

This echoes stanza 5:

> . . . unjengobhaqa
> Olukhanya luxosh' umnyama exhibeni, . . .
>
> . . . You are like a lamp
> Which chases the darkness from the hut, . . .

Wandering around singing at night, being in a drunk, drugged, or mad state, eating strange foods, fidgeting and restlessness, strange uncontrolled sobbing; all of these are manifestations of very unusual behaviour. What do they all mean? For answer we turn to Krige's *Social System of the Zulus*[10] and Berglund's *Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolism*[11]. Krige describes how one becomes an *isangoma*:

> The profession of diviner is not hereditary; the spirits simply possess anyone whom they wish to become a doctor, and he becomes ill until he has undergone a lengthy initiation under the guidance of some other doctor, usually pointed out by the spirits possessing him. (p. 299)

Krige describes the symptoms of one so possessed:

> He begins to grow delicate and eccentric, dreaming extraordinary and numerous dreams about wild beasts and serpents; he hears voices calling him and telling him to go to a certain spot to find roots; he talks to imps and spirits; . . . He becomes particular about his food and . . . confines his diet to meat, dregs of beer, mixed with maize, and wild herbs. He wanders about alone in the veld looking for medicinal roots;

Later, when the symptoms of possession are more pronounced:

> . . . he yawns again and again and sneezes frequently; he begins to feel the spirits in his shoulders and his body. He begins to shed tears, and often weeps aloud. In the middle of the night, when people are asleep, he wakes them up by singing, for the spirits are causing him to sing songs of initiation.

Berglund gives these symptoms in more detail (on p. 137), together with some new aspects. Of the dreams, he says that it is typical of them that they are unclear and not understandable. He agrees with the yawns, sneezes, and weeping, but adds belches and hiccups as more advanced symptoms. Berglund further adds an interesting dimension:

> A person called by the shades to become a diviner finds himself being increasingly active at night. Such a person claims that there is no sleep 'because there is something in the body'. Others tend to become restless, others wander about. Diviners themselves give great importance to these nightly activities. Asked whether one could be a diviner without being awake at night, practically all answered that this would be impossible. 'The night is the time of the shades. That is the time when they speak clearly, troubling people whom they call.' (p. 138)

Like Vilakazi, the diviners prefer that part of the night just before dawn:

> After the initiation, the diviner spends much time of the night consulting with the shades, nearly all diviners claiming that the best time for such communication with them being either as soon as people have fallen asleep, i.e. the early night, or preferably, the very early hours of the morning before any of the homestead's other members have woken up.

A number of otherwise inexplicable incidents in the poem 'Mamina' become clear if we regard them as manifesting the behaviour of one who is *'thwasa*-ing', i.e. being called upon by the spirits to become an *isangoma.* For example, in stanza 18:

> Ngantwela nawe ngakugeza
> Ezihlabathini zolwandle ingani
> Ngibon' abanye begeza ngamanzi.
>
> And I began to understand you and I washed you
> In the sands of the sea even though
> I saw others washing in water.

Krige states that one who is possessed by the spirits 'does not wash or anoint his body'. Berglund takes this a little further:

> The brooding of the shades is associated with abstention from washing in water . . . While washing in chyme is re-

> garded as 'washing in the animal of the shades', washing in water is looked upon as the washing away of shades. (p. 129)

Berglund makes it clear, however, that when water *is* used for washing, it must be from 'living' water:

> When washing, the novice is expected to bathe in cold water . . . [which] should preferably be fetched from below a water-fall. Waterfalls and the murmuring of running water are regarded as the signs of *amanzi aphilayo*. (p. 157)

> As for the water, it is not just water. It is living (*amanzi aphilayo*), meaning that something is happening today. (p. 167)

Imagery of running water can be found in most of Vilakazi's poetry[12], and in his early 'Impophoma yeVictoria' ('The Victoria Falls') the whole essence of the poem is the life and vitality of the waterfall. In 'Mamina' we are told that Vilakazi washes with sand, but, none the less, the poem has several references to *amanzi aphilayo*. Stanza 1, where Vilakazi first 'meets' Mamina, as it were, refers to a quiet corner:

> Lapho kuvuk' imithombo yamanzi
> Ematisa amadwal' aluhlaza
> Abushelezi ngenxa yesilele.
>
> Where the springs of water awaken
> And wet the green rocks
> Slippery with moss.

Stanza 25 echoes this perfectly:

> Ngakumemel' emithonjeni yamanzi
> Ivuzela phezu kwamadwala
> Angulwe ngesilele sohlaza, . . .
>
> I invited you to the fountain of water
> Which falls over the flat rocks
> Covered with green moss, . . .

Mamina herself is clearly related to the living quality of the water in stanza 7, as already quoted:

> Ngiyawubon' umzimba wakh' usuluza
> Njengohlanga ludlaliswa amanzi, . . .

I see your body swaying
Like a reed played with by water, . . .

I have already quoted, to illustrate Vilakazi's adoration and idealisation of Mamina, stanza 17, with the white-tailed bushbuck does, the sledge of grass, the anklets of red aloe. Two lines in this stanza bear further investigation:

Ngikuhlalisil' esihlibini sengca,
Ngaselula ngomhlanga uphicwe nembubu, . . .

I seated you on a sledge of grass,
I wove it from reeds interlaced with soft grass, . . .

Berglund describes the treatment of an initiate, who is made to sit on a special mat:

'What is the purpose of the mat?'
'The mat? It is the thing of the rushes (*umhlanga*) . . . She sits on a mat. It is the mat of the rivers . . . the waters of the river and the reeds of the mat work together in creating.'

There can surely be no doubt about the connection between the behaviour of the inspired poet in 'Mamina' and the behaviour of one who is firstly possessed by the ancestral spirits and subsequently undergoes training as an *isangoma*. Clearly we must look again at the role of the girl Mamina in the poem. I suggested earlier that she was the personification of Vilakazi's personal muse of poetry. I do not wish to discard this interpretation entirely, but clearly we must go further. There is textual evidence to support the interpretation of Mamina representing an *idlozi* possessing him, although Vilakazi is at first uncertain. In stanza 14 he asks:

Uthi awungikhohlisi, Mamina!
. . .
'Uthi awuyen' omnunye wamathongo?'

Please do not deceive me, Mamina!
. . .
'Are you not one of the ancestral spirits?'

Later, in stanza 23, he seems more sure:

Manje ngiyabuza kuwe, Mamina,
Wena engibon' ukuth' ungomunye

Walemingcwi yamathongo
Engizulisa ngilele . . .

And now I ask you, Mamina,
You who I see to be one
Of these spirits of ancestors
Who make me restless when I sleep . . .

By the end of the poem he is quite sure:

Woza, siyozicoshel' umsobo nowowoza,
Lokhu yikhona kudla kwamathongo,
Akuphathelwa malemba . . .
Kwehle nawe wangifundisa ukukudla.

Come, we will pick for ourselves soft green herbs,
Those which are the food of the spirits,
Untouched by hoes . . .
It came down with you and you taught me to eat it.
(Stanza 29)

It is clear from both Berglund and Krige that the power of the *isangoma* lies in her ability to communicate with the ancestors, and even to leave for a time this world, and to visit the *amadlozi* beneath the earth. Vilakazi ends the poem with a wish to do likewise:

Woza Mamina,
Ngizwa ngifikelwa yisizungu.
'Lomhlab' angiwuzw' awunasiphephelo.
Ngidonse siye kwelakini, Mamina . . .

Come, Mamina,
I feel overcome with loneliness.
As for this earth, I don't feel it, it has no place of refuge.
Pull me and let us go to your place, Mamina, . . . (Stanza 30)

Can we say that during his short life, and during his period as a lecturer at Witwatersrand University, Vilakazi was possessed by his ancestral spirits and that he was undergoing training as a diviner? There is no record of this, and although one does not wish to discard the idea entirely, it seems hardly likely. Why, then, the clearly deliberate parallels of behaviour? There are two possible answers. The first considers Vilakazi's personal relationship with society — as a lonely introvert. The second, as he saw his *role* in society — as an interpreter and go-between.

Let us consider the first possibility. It is clear from most of Vilakazi's later poetry that in the latter half of his life he felt himself to be isolated from society. We saw this a moment ago in the last stanza of 'Mamina': 'I feel overcome with loneliness . . . this earth has no place of refuge'. We first sense this feeling of isolation in stanza 7 of 'KwaDedangendlale':

> Ngabona nokushela
> Kwezintombi nezinsizwa.
> . . .
> Ngema ngafikelw' umona,
> Ngaziduduza nganxanye.
>
> And I saw the courting
> Of the maidens and young men.
> . . .
> I stood overcome with jealousy,
> [but] I comforted myself privately.

The idea of exclusion here is repeated in stanza 19 of 'Mamina' which gives a very accurate and amusing picture of young men courting. Vilakazi, however, is not able to participate, and the description ends with 'Ithunzi lesikhwele langisinda' ('The shadow of jealousy was heavy on me'). Vilakazi's sense of isolation is not confined to courting scenes. In stanza 15 of 'Mamina' Vilakazi describes the *amasoka* as brave young men, with himself as the gentle poet in contrast. They *giya* (perform mock fights in dance), but his is 'not a song of shields and sticks' ('akunkondlo yamahawu namawisa'),. This feeling of being different is strongly expressed in stanza 17:

> Kwaphenduka min' intombi kanti ngiyinsizwa, . . .
>
> And I changed into a girl even though I am a man, . . .

Stanza 15 suggests most clearly the idea of being isolated from clan or tribe:

> Us' ungenze ngabangaka ngothando,
> Kwabangath' angiyen' okaZulu
> Phakathi kwenkatha kaSobantu.
>
> You have made me so much [like this] with love,
> It is as if I am not one of the Zulus
> In the 'inkatha' of Sobantu.[13]

Vilakazi clearly feels that he is not conforming to the norms demanded by society. But he recognises that there are indeed certain members of society who are accepted even though, and perhaps even because, they do not conform to any of the norms: the *izangoma*. The *isangoma* eats differently, he dresses differently, he is active at night when others are asleep, and yet, as Krige says, he is 'one of the pivots upon which the welfare of society rests, and he is for this reason most highly respected'. The *isangoma* is respected because the ancestors themselves have called upon him to perform his task. We recall how, in his 'inspirational' period, the ancestors called upon Vilakazi in dreams, and directed him to write poetry. I suggest, then, that the imagery of the *isangoma* in Vilakazi's poetry, which reaches its apogee in 'Mamina' is Vilakazi's attempt to explain his own individuality in terms of the *isangoma* cultural framework, and thus achieve social acceptance.

My second suggestion regarding the *isangoma* imagery in 'Mamina' and elsewhere is related to the call by the *amadlozi,* both to *izangoma* generally to divine, and to Vilakazi specifically to write poetry.

The *isangoma* is a social interpreter; he sees beneath the surface and reveals what is hidden. He is the interpreter of dreams, and therefore the link between the *abaphilayo* and the *abaphansi,* i.e. the living and those below. Vilakazi sees that the poet does something similar in that he puts the inchoate into words; that he puts into tangible form that which his audience only vaguely thinks or feels. This gives rise to a chracteristic kind of image in Vilakazi's poetry, where an abstract issue is resolved as something concrete, usually in terms of eating or drinking, or as household utensils. So in his request to the 'Ithongo Lokwazi' ('Spirit of Knowledge'):

> Ngiphe, ungicaphunele namuhla
> Kuleyondebe oyigcin' ethala lobuzwe,
> Ikhono lokugcoba phansi lokhw' engikuzwayo, . . .
>
> Give me, serve out for me today
> In that same dish which you keep on the sacred shelf
> of the nation,
> The skill of writing down that which I hear and
> understand, . . .

In 'KwaDedangendlale', using the same imagery, Vilakazi sees himself as collector and preserver:

> Ngiphe indaw' enjenga lena
> Wena Thongo likababa,

Lapho ngiyoba namandla,
Ngiqoq' umqondo kaZulu,
Ngiwuvalel' embizeni.

Give me a place like this
O spirit of my father,
Where I will become strong,
And collect together the mind of the Zulus,
And conserve it in a large pot.

Finally, to justify the suggestion that the *isangoma* imagery underlies the role of interpreter, stanza 21 of 'Mamina':

Vuk' umhlwenga phimbo lami,
Ungehlulwe yigekle lomhlanga.
Unkulunkul' ukunik' amalaka,
Nolimi nezindebe zokuphumesa
Iminjunju nemizindlo, nemicabango
Eqhuma emithonjeni yomphefumulo.
. . .
Dweba phansi okwaziyo nokuzwayo,
Ithongo lizokuhumushela ngosiba.

Arouse yourself, O my throat,
That you be not surpassed by a reed flute.
God has given you vocal cords,
And a tongue and lips of speaking out
The pains and ponderings, and the thoughts,
Which burst from the fountains of the soul.
. . .
Write down what you know and feel and hear,
The spirit will interpret for you with a pen.

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NOTES

1. *isangoma* (plural: *izangoma*): diviner, seer, 'witch-doctor'.
2. Caluza was a well-known singer, and Cele a renowned musician in Vilakazi's day.
3. *idlozi* (plural: *amadlozi*): spirit of the deceased, shade of the departed.
4. The Zulus give the call of the night-jar as 'Zavolo, Zavolo, sengel' abantabakho': 'Zavolo, Zavolo, milk for [provide for] your children'.
5. The Zulus see walking around at night as anti-social behaviour as this is the time of *ubuthakathi* (witchcraft). Anyone who habitually walks around at night is suspected of sorcery.

6. *uNomkhubulwane:* 'Zulu female deity, a native "Ceres" believed to affect the planting of corn and harvest'. (Doke and Vilakazi: *Zulu-English Dictionary,* Witwatersrand University Press, 1958; p. 584.)
7. *iviyo:* the wild medlar fruit *Vangueria infausta*
iziphofu: wild loquats
ibhonsi: fruit and plant of *Salacia alterniflora*
ibhiconsi: Cordia caffra tree with edible fruit.
(Doke and Vilakazi: *Dictionary*)
8. *ibhungane:* a species of beetle which is believed to cause certain forms of madness when it enters someone's head.
9. *umsobo:* species of nightshade, *Solanum nigrum*
uwowoza: a species of climber.
(Doke and Vilakazi: *Dictionary*)
10. E.J. Krige: *The Social System of the Zulus,* Longmans, 1936.
11. A-I. Berglund: *Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolism,* Uppsala, 1975.
12. See E.Z.T.S. Mthiyane: *Water as a Focus of Symbolism in Vilakazi's Prose and Poetry,* unpublished Honours dissertation, University of Zululand, 1971.
13. *inkatha:* originally, a grass head-ring, now with the figurative meaning of a circle, a group.
uSobantu: (lit.) the father of the people.

CENSORSHIP, ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND PUBLIC DEBATE*

by A.S. MATHEWS

We normally think of censorship as a limitation on the freedom to express our thoughts and beliefs. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines censorship as an 'official restriction on *ideas*[1] . . .' Historically censorship has served as a device for protecting official beliefs and ideologies and for suppressing those that are opposed to them. But censorship may equally be used to withhold facts or to prevent their dissemination; and a system of censorship which invests some facts or sets of facts with the stamp of official approval while outlawing others, is as dangerous to democracy as one which creates an official truth in the realm of thought and belief. The censorship of facts is possibly a more insidious threat to freedom since where facts which could be the basis of new or contrary ideas are suppressed, it may not even be realized that censorship is being applied. The proscription of an idea or belief is by contrast a direct and obvious act of censorship. Moreover, it is easier to refute a false idea than an idea based on false or distorted information because the fact that it is so based may never be known. For these reasons the modern tendency to extend censorship to facts is dangerous and deplorable.

This condemnation of the censorship of facts holds even if the censoring authority bases its action on the alleged falsity of the facts being suppressed and even if the disseminator of the 'facts' cannot prove them to be true. In the context of this paper 'fact' is defined as a statement that something has been done or has happened, and it is the censorship of such statements that is generally indefensible. Even where the decision to censor facts is taken on the basis of their alleged falsity it is no more than plausible to argue that such censorship is justifiable and even desirable. For one thing, the censoring authority — generally the state or an official or body dependent upon it — usually has an unrestricted or barely restricted power to determine truth. It follows that the protection of partisan interests is likely to influence the decision as to whether facts should be suppressed or released. But even if the authority is granted to some person or body independent of the government, it remains dangerous to outlaw statements of fact from the domain of public discussion. This is because the determination of truth in matters of a social or political nature is

*This is the text of a paper read at the *Conference on Censorship* held at the University of Cape Town in April, 1980.

complex and difficult and not really suitable for resolution by judicial or quasi-judicial procedures. There is a world of difference between a court pronouncement that policeman Swanepoel unnecessarily shot rioter Nzimande during a disturbance and a censor board decision that a piece of writing, which alleges that the police behaved repressively towards demonstrators in a township, is false. The judicial enquiry has a narrower focus and a correspondingly higher chance of reaching a correct decision on a sharply defined issue. Moreover, in the judicial proceedings evidence bearing directly on the issue before the court is adduced by both sides and carefully evaluated by the court. By contrast, determination of the falsity of the statement that the police behaved repressively involves an enquiry into a complex of inter-related actions and precludes the possibility of a simple, direct finding. The issues requiring determination are more shadowy and less amenable to clear-cut answers. A censor board cannot (and does not) take detailed evidence on all the facts relevant to the validity of its final pronouncement that the statement is or is not true. An investigation of that kind will necessarily be excessively time-consuming and complicated and the final judgment of the censoring authority, even where it is the culmination of a painstaking enquiry, is likely to lack general credibility and to be strenuously contested by those on whom it reflects. The conclusion seems inescapable that the determination of the truth of statements about social and political matters is not amenable to official regulation and that to make it so is dangerous since there cannot be an official truth in such matters. The judgment in these cases must be a political one, all individuals and groups in the society being free to put forward their own version and interpretation of the facts. A public that surrenders its right of choice between alternative sets of facts makes itself vulnerable to manipulation and control.

This last conclusion takes on a heightened significance when, as in South Africa, there has been a decided expansion of censorship from its more traditional concerns (obscenity, heresy, blasphemy) into the social and political arena. The Publications Act[2] makes no distinction between the censorship of facts and opinions, and a publication may be declared undesirable even if it is essentially factual in nature. The definition of 'undesirable'[3] makes it clear that the grounds of censorship may be political. This is because an 'undesirable' publication includes one which is 'harmful to the relations between any sections of the inhabitants of the Republic' or which 'is prejudicial to the safety of the state, the general welfare or the peace and good order'. In a recent article on censorship, Louise Silver expresses the following conclusion:

> From this brief examination of the statistics it appears that the number of works that have been found to be undesirable on political grounds . . . has grown considerably and that the number of items the possession of which has been prohibited . . . has grown at an even greater rate.[4]

She then concludes that 'South Africans are increasingly denied access to material relating to political events and to views about South Africa at a time when there is a pressing need to have an informed public'.[5] An inspection of the weekly lists of material banned under the Publications Act reveals that much of it is either wholly or partly factual in nature. Examples of essentially factual material that has been banned are a documentary study on 'Detention Without Trial in South Africa',[6] another on 'Torture in South Africa?'[7] and a pamphlet entitled 'Riot Police and the Suppression of Truth'.[8] That it is the policy of the Publications Board to censor material of a factual kind appears in the following remarkable statement in a letter from the Director of Publications giving reasons for the banning of 'Detention Without Trial in South Africa':

> It should be made clear that a well-documented, accurate, fully researched and impartial document on the scope of detentions need not *per se* be undesirable.[9]

How readily the South African censors are prepared to put on the dangerous mantle of judge of the truth and accuracy of political facts in South Africa.

The Publications Act of 1974 is one of the newest of the measures which authorizes the suppression of information. Prior to the enactment of the Publications Act and its predecessor of 1963,[10] there were already in existence a number of laws which prohibited the dissemination of information or authorized its suppression. The Publications Act is broader than these other measures in one important sense. The other laws, such as those relating to official secrets, defence, prisons and police, refer in the main (but not exclusively) to *official* information — information, that is, held by or emanating from an official source. An enormous extension of the censorship of information has been achieved by the Publications Act since, under its provisions, the dissemination of privately generated information as well as official information can be prohibited. The source of the information is irrelevant under the Publications Act; it may be banned whatever its origin. By extending control to private information, the authorities have closed the net entirely and all factual material is potentially subject to control. But the other legislation remains

significant because the state is today the custodian of ever-increasing stocks of information.

Modern bureaucracies have become great storehouses of information. Information is a source of both power and manipulation. By keeping information secret a government may increase its power over opponents and create a climate for the manipulation of its citizens. There is no longer any doubt, for example, that the suppression of information by the American government, including unwelcome information supplied by its own intelligence agencies, conditioned the public to the continuance of the war in Vietnam and delayed the resistance to the war that was ultimately developed by government opponents. On account of the structures of bureaucracies and age-old attitudes within them, laws are hardly necessary to ensure that information that the government wishes to suppress is kept secret.[11] Nevertheless many governments that call themselves democratic have enacted sweeping laws of this kind, the record of our own country being considerably worse than most. When our rulers have done this in the name of freedom and democracy, one is reminded of Mark Tapley's remark in *Martin Chuzzlewit:* 'They've such a passion with Liberty, that they can't help taking liberties with her'.[12] Let us examine briefly what liberties our legislators have taken with the freedom of information.

The first liberty, if I may continue the metaphor, was an act of complete ravishment expressed in the form of the 1956 South Africa Official Secrets Act.[13] In this measure British law on the protection of government information, which previously applied directly in South Africa, was taken over, extended and rendered more obscure. I do not propose to analyse its provisions but rather to give some indication of its grotesquely absurd scope. The central prohibition of this law is directed against the dissemination without authority of any information about the central or provincial governments in South Africa whether this information relates to the high affairs of state or the lowly affairs of individual government branches, including the habits of the staff, right down, as one commentator put it, to the number of cups of tea that they drink in working hours. When this law was passed it was as if a giant hand, wielding an enormous rubber stamp, had come down on the entire government apparatus in South Africa, leaving all over it the imprint 'top secret'. Even today, in the first year of the eighties, that law and that imprint remain and make government in South Africa an operation that takes place by 'cloud and by night'.

The Defence Act[14] supplements the Official Secrets Act and prohibits publication (i) of information relating to the South African or a foreign defence force 'calculated', *inter alia*, to alarm or

depress members of the public or (ii) of secret or confidential information relating to the defence of the Republic. With regard to this second category, all information relating to the defence of the Republic is presumed secret or confidential until the contrary is proved. The *fact* that South Africa went to war in Angola was a defence secret which newspapers were prevented from publishing until after the war was over, a situation which I, as a member of the public, found alarming and depressing to a degree more criminal than the actual Defence Act crime of alarming or depressing the public. Thomas Jefferson said of the citizens of a society at war that 'it is their sweat which is to earn all the expenses of war, and their blood which is to flow in expiation of the causes of it'. Yet our government and our law denies them even the knowledge that sweat and blood is being exacted. I leave aside, for the moment, the question of how the public is to judge the wisdom of entering or continuing the war when they learn about it only afterwards. Thomas Emerson has said of legal and constitutional developments in the United States that they have created a situation in which the principle of free and open discussion of war and defence issues essential to the life of democracy now enjoys broad acceptance.[15] In this country where the Defence legislation is, as we have seen, more restrictive, and where there is no First Amendment for the courts to enforce, there can be no meaningful discussion of war issues since the necessary information on which such discussion needs to be based is not available. Whether the Steyn Commission investigating the reporting of defence matters will provide an impetus towards improvement of the laws remains to be seen. While I do not wish to oversimplify the very difficult problem of maintaining a balance between the secrecy needed to preserve a nation's defence capacity and the publicity required for democratic control over defence policy[16], the balance that is struck in South Africa simply sacrifices the right of public discussion to the interests of secrecy.

The long-standing prohibition on the publication of false information about prisons or prisoners and the new restriction on the publication of false information about the police are so similar in form, function and effect that I shall consider them together. The first prohibition[17] makes it a crime to publish any false information concerning the experience in prison of any prisoner or ex-prisoner or relating to the administration of any prison. The second[18] criminalizes the publication of 'any untrue matter in relation to any action by the Force or any part of the Force, or any member of the Force in relation to the performance of his functions as such member . . .' In the first case (information concerning prisons) the accused may escape liability by proving that he took reasonable steps to verify the accuracy of the information;

and in the second (information concerning the police) he is exonerated if he can prove that he had reasonable grounds for believing the statement to be true. If we discount the influence of the socio-political context of laws on their practical application, there is a temptation to acclaim the reasonableness that seems to shine through the statutory prohibitions. The government is, after all, only punishing those who publish false information about prisoners and the police force; and even then the accused can escape punishment if he took reasonable steps to verify the information about prisons or if he had reasonable grounds for believing the statement about the police to be true. How perverse and churlish it seems to criticize a government for passing and enforcing such a measure.

Closer investigation reveals that this provision presents one of the most striking illustrations of how the law in practice may diverge from, and even contradict, the 'law in books'. The 1965 allegations of maltreatment in the prisons published by the *Rand Daily Mail* and followed by the prosecution and punishment of the publishers and jailing of the informant, Harold Strachan, were the last critical exposés of prison conditions to be undertaken by the press in South Africa. Nobody but a fool would believe that this is because all is sweetness and light in our gaols today. Why then the silence about prisons? The answer, in small part, lies in the judgment in *S* v *South African Associated Newspapers*[19] in which the court took an unrealistic view of what constitutes reasonable steps to verify the accuracy of information. But the real explanation of why a law that ostensibly restricts the publication of *false* information in practice suppresses *all* information must be sought in the socio-political realities of our society. The authorities in South Africa, especially the police, are all powerful; and the citizens are virtually rightless. The man who bucks the system can be dealt with without any real danger of legal or political retribution. Casting a slur on our prisons or police is a threat to our national survival and it becomes a patriotic duty to defend the system against such attacks and to ensure that they do not take place. However this may come about, there will always be plenty of witnesses to testify to the clement regime that prevails in prisons and police stations and few, if any, prepared to take risks involved in being dealt with as a traitor to one's country. In brief, the authorities have total power whilst their critics are impotent. It takes courage, even where public and private rights are more equally balanced, to take a government head-on over issues which it has defined as central. The making of a film like *And Justice For All* is simply unthinkable in South Africa where the balance favours the authorities. The result is that hard information about police and prison matters has been put out of circulation in our country.

How central is information about prisons and the police to the public debate in South Africa? How important an item is it on the political agenda? The answer to these questions is that it is vitally important however much ruling politicians may try to diminish or ignore the subject. The hard realities of the racial policies of the government (and these policies are right at the centre of politics) are encountered by hundreds of thousands of people each year in prisons or in police stations. It is there that the impact of these policies is felt. What are the consequences of that impact on relations between the races in South Africa and on the possibility of political accommodation and the avoidance of strife? Can anyone dispute that such questions will be of momentous importance in a society that has criminalized almost all forms of inter-racial contact? Yet on these very questions we are denied the information that we require to judge and formulate any necessary policy correctives. On the available evidence the government has totally precluded policy correctives; to do so in an information vacuum is to court disaster.

The law restricting the publication of information relating to the police is a post-Muldergate law. The government seems to have drawn the perverse lesson from the Muldergate affair that information was getting, or had got, out of hand and that new restraints were needed. Acting on that lesson, it enacted another measure in 1979 which, in time, will contribute much to the impoverishment of information and public debate on the country. The law is an anti-sanctions measure and authorizes the appropriate Minister, by notice in the Gazette, to prohibit the disclosure of any information relating to any goods or services.[20] The statutory prohibition is just as bald and unqualified as I have expressed it — any information relating to *any* goods or any *services* may be suppressed. The law is typical of our anti-disclosure legislation in the total failure to attempt to balance the public's right to know against the government's duty to conceal. It is based on the unacknowledged principle that if you take power to ban everything then you will be sure of having the power to ban the category of sensitive material which if released would be harmful to the public interest; in other words that the surest way to cure the disease is to kill the patient. What this approach ignores is that there is another public interest involved — the promotion of meaningful, democratic debate on all major political decisions. A government that is wise will attempt to cure the disease by limiting its prohibitions to information that is clearly sensitive and so limit the damage to the ailing patient — democratic politics in South Africa.

The legislation referred to so far provides for the direct control of information. Other laws, too numerous for detailed analysis,

indirectly screen out unwelcome material. I personally have no doubt that numbers of people who have been banned under the Internal Security Act or detained under one of our many detention laws, are being punished for bringing information that is unpalatable to the authorities to the attention of the public. The control over meetings under laws like the Riotous Assemblies Act has the same indirect impact on information flow to the general public. In a nutshell, laws directly and indirectly controlling information in South Africa constitute a fine-meshed screen through which little material of consequence may pass without the permission of the authorities.

Does Muldergate itself not refute the proposition that information flow is under tight official control? I think not, for two main reasons. The Muldergate revelations were brought about by a concatenation of circumstances that are unlikely ever to be repeated. The crucial event in Muldergate was that a judge with a very high degree of courage and an unconventional approach to his responsibilities as judge-commissioner, defied the Prime Minister and went public. If there is another judge prepared to act in the same way in similar circumstances, I cannot see the authorities ever putting him in a position to do so. But quite apart from that, Muldergate has been followed by a series of anti-disclosure laws designed to ensure that politically embarrassing revelations of that magnitude are never repeated. In any event, Muldergate itself was well managed by the government which made it seem to be largely a case of the misuse of public money for private gain. The essence of Muldergate was not private corruption but the misuse of state funds and the state machinery for *party political* advantage. This fact is still not appreciated by the bulk of the white population, and certainly not by government supporters.

But even if I am wrong and the occasional dramatic disclosure does occur from time to time, the point remains that as a general rule the kind of information that the public needs to participate in government decision-making will not be available. Fortified by the laws I have mentioned and the reliability of the bureaucracy, the government will withhold information embarrassing to itself and release only its own favourable interpretations of official information about the social and political realities of our society. It goes without saying that there is, as in Sweden or America, no law giving citizens the positive right to extract information from the government arsenal. What effect does this have on public discussion and participation in decision-making?

In memorable words, Madison declared that democracy becomes a farce without citizen access to the relevant facts. He said:

> A popular Government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but the Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy; or perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance: And a people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.

I propose to assume, as Madison does, that democracy implies more than the right to vote representatives into office; that it extends to the right of active participation, chiefly by means of public discussion and debate, in the policy formation of the society. Clearly, if public debate is to be meaningful in the sense that it contributes to better decisions by public authorities, the information relevant to the decisions must be as full as possible and as undistorted as possible. Excessive governmental secrecy, it has been shown,[21] precludes the possibility of a meaningful contribution by the public by concealing or distorting one or more of the following:

(a) the assumptions of fact on which the decision was based (were these correct or incorrect?);
(b) the alternatives that were canvassed prior to the decision (was a better alternative left out of the reckoning?);
(c) the interest furthered by the decision (are private group interests being furthered as if they were national interests?).

When information of that kind is not available, the public might easily fail to oppose a bad decision or press for a good one. Equally a government may push through and implement bad decisions whilst simultaneously excluding good ones simply because there is widespread ignorance about the basis for, consequences of, and the interests served by, the decision actually adopted. Just as decision-making is impoverished by the absence of informed public debate, so it will also suffer where specialist groups outside the government whose expertize may greatly enrich the quality of policy formulation, are neutralized by the non-availability of relevant information.

Most discussions of the harm caused by the suppression of information assume that the victims of secrecy are citizens rather than rulers. It is true that the primary losers are the ordinary citizens of the society who chiefly pay for, and carry the brunt of, mistaken government policies. The neglect of the harm caused to the rulers of an excessively secret society, and to the state itself, is nevertheless unfortunate. In the seventeenth century Spinoza argued that a state that punished opinions injured itself,[22] a principle equally applicable to a state that suppresses information. Again, I believe the control of information to be more sinister than that of opinion since some of the great political myths of our

time — myths that have enabled misguided policies to flourish — are directly attributable to the manipulation of information. It was in this way that the White rulers of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia and their supporters succumbed to the great 'cognitive catastrophe' which sustained the belief that their policies would do otherwise than drive black voters into the Mugabe camp. Are South African policies not sustained by a similar myth, the myth of the moderate black majority that is contented with its lot and committed to moderate political solutions? Our system of political repression, including the denial of relevant information, may result in an equally unwelcome truth breaking over the government like a tidal wave after it is too late to make policy changes.

In an unconventional analysis of politics, Karl D.W. Deutsch has described it as a 'network of communication channels', the amount and spread of information and the strength of mechanisms for communication being the most important indicators of a political community.[23] He describes political action as a form of steering, not in terms of the power relations between the rulers and the governed. The following passage from his book emphasizes the importance of communication to the art of steering the ship of state:

> All self-direction — and hence self government — is a process of steering. It must combine several streams of information: past information as to what its goal or target is; current outside information as to where the goal or target is; and internal information as where the system itself is in relation to the goal.[24]

Whatever the validity of this approach to political analysis, it does incorporate some important and valid propositions. Of these, I regard the most significant to be the observation that by destroying or distorting the information system of a political community, successful political action becomes endangered because of 'cognitive impoverishment' or, if the suppression of information is severe, on account of a 'cognitive catastrophe'. With the example of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia before us, I suggest that the censorship of facts in South Africa has already placed our rulers in a state of 'cognitive impoverishment' and that they would do well to prevent this turning into a catastrophe.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Emphasis supplied.
2. 42 of 1974.
3. Section 47(2).
4. Louise Silver 'The Statistics of Censorship', 1979 (96) *SALJ* 120, 126.
5. Ibid.
6. GN 2222 of 21 October 1977 (Gazette 5785 of 21 October 1977).
7. GN 909 of 17 May 1977 (Gazette 5554 of 17 May 1977).
8. GN 618 of 22 April 1977 (Gazette 5515 of 22 April 1977).
9. Letter from the Director of the Publications Board dated 10 November 1977.
10. Act 26 of 1963.
11. For an analysis of the causes of bureaucratic secrecy, the reader may consult A.S. Mathews *The Darker Reaches of Government,* (Juta, 1978), pp. 14–16.
12. Charles Dickens *Martin Chuzzlewit,* Chapter XVII.
13. 16 of 1956.
14. 44 of 1957.
15. Thomas F. Emerson *The System of Freedom of Expression,* (Vintage Books, 1970), pp. 69–70.
16. These difficulties are well canvassed by Dina Goren in *Secrecy and the Right to Know,* (Turtledove Publishing, Israel, 1979).
17. Section 44(f) of the Prisons Act 8 of 1959.
18. Section 27B of the Police Act 7 of 1958 introduced by section 9 of the Police Amendment Act 64 of 1979.
19. 1970(1) SA 469 (W).
20. Section 8B of the National Supplies Procurement Act 89 of 1970 inserted by section 1 of Act 73 of 1979.
21. David Curzon 'The Generic Secrets of Government Decision-Making', in *Government Secrecy in Democracies,* ed. I Galnoor (New York Univ. Press, 1977), p. 93.
22. Quoted by Leonard Levy in *Freedom of Speech and Press in Early American History: Legacy of Suppression,* (Harper Torch Books, 1963), p. 90.
23. Karl W. Deutsch *Politics and Government: How People Decide Their Fate,* (Houghton Mifflin Co, Boston, 1970).
24. Ibid., p. 160.

ATHOL FUGARD'S DEVELOPMENT: A STOCKTAKING*

by STEPHEN GRAY

The interview with Athol Fugard which follows was conducted at his home near Port Elizabeth by Barrie Hough on 30 November 1977.[1] Of the many interviews Fugard has given on various aspects of his life and work, this is certainly the widest-ranging to date; and the only other to equal it in scope predates it.[2] At the time of Hough's interview, Fugard himself was in a transitional phase marking time, as it were, until what he had achieved up to that date had jelled into various firm publications, and planning the works which are so clearly in mind as he talks here.

The relationship between Fugard's first nights and the resultant publication of his plays and other works has hardly ever been a straightforward, linear one, so it would be as well to outline the position as of November 1977, and also to show how the shape of his development has been somewhat drastically realigned by subsequent developments.

By November 1977 the collection of plays that is simply called *Statements*[3] had proved by far his most enduring and influential seller. It includes the two 'collaborative' improvised plays with John Kani and Winston Ntshona, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (premiered in 1972) and *The Island* (1973), and his own *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act* (1972). In the same year (i.e. 1974) his three earlier plays of the 'family group' of four — *The Blood Knot* (1963), *Hello and Goodbye* (1966) and *Boesman and Lena* (1969) — had been bought from their three different South African publishers[4] and reappeared in slightly revised texts from Oxford as *Three Port Elizabeth Plays,* which coincided with the release of Fugard's first feature film (of *Boesman and Lena,* directed by Ross Devenish). His career up to the date of the interview, then, had seemed to fall into the two clear phases of the 'family' plays of the 60s and the 'collaborative' plays of the early 70s, an impression which in terms of publication would become stronger in 1978 when Oxford caught up the obvious straggler in this grouping, *People are Living There* (premiered in 1969 and first published in South Africa in the same year by Buren), and expanded the *Three Port Elizabeth Plays* into the collection of four now known as *Boesman and Lena and Other Plays,* to which by November 1977 Fugard had written his fullest introduction.

*The author has submitted this article to mark the award of an honorary degree to Athol Fugard. The degree of Doctor of Literature will be conferred on him at the University of Natal, Durban, in April 1981.

Also in 1977 — which seems to have been Fugard's *annus mirabilis* in terms of publishing — a further collection, including his most recent play, *Dimetos* (premiered in 1975) was in proof, dated that year (although it did not appear in the bookshops until after this interview).

To summarize Fugard's career to that date, Theatre Quarterly Publications had conveniently issued a most complete checklist on Fugard,[5] which also included synopses of the two earlier plays (i.e. pre-*Blood Knot*), *No-Good Friday* (premiered in South Africa in 1958 and not previously published) and *Nongogo* (1959, with the same publishing fate), which first appeared in print in *Dimetos and Two Early Plays*. By 1977, thanks to the successful revival of these two plays in tandem in Sheffield in 1974, Fugard had decided that his reputation was sufficiently secure for these two 'apprentice' works to be released without prejudice to his stature. The only other work in book form at the time of this interview (excluding anthologies) was the screenplay of his second film, *The Guest,*[6] which follows *Dimetos* in terms of order of composition.

Hough, then, met Fugard at the end of a year which had seen the appearance in book form of no less than eight works (out of a total of thirteen),[7] representing twenty and more years of writing and work in the theatre and in film.

Subsequent to this interview only two works have appeared, both of which are interstitial in the whole sequence. Neither are 'new' works but their delayed appearances have, to some extent, forced a reshaping of our view of the entire development. They are the text of *Orestes* (first devised in 1971 — i.e. between *Boesman and Lena* and *The Coat,* and *Statements after an Arrest* and *Sizwe Bansi*), first published in 1978,[8] and the one that has thrown many of the orthodox assumptions about the chronology somewhat out — his first novel, *Tsotsi,* which lay forgotten after its composition in 1960–1 until it first appeared in print in 1979.[9] *Tsotsi*'s date of composition, it turns out, is coincidental with the first drafting of *Blood Knot,* and thus it may now be seen that *No-Good Friday, Nongogo* and *Tsotsi* form what might conveniently be called the 'Sophiatown renaissance' trilogy of the late 50s, which forms a coherent 'first' phase in itself, which then makes the 'family' sequence of the 60s a 'second' phase, and the 'collaborative' plays of the early 70s a 'third' phase.

At the time of writing this (May 1980), very little work written by Fugard prior to the interview remains unpublished: there are only the sketches and one-act plays (e.g: *The Cell* — manuscript unaccounted for) of the earliest phase of all, derived from the period from 1956, which saw the experiments of the Circle Players group with Sheila Fugard in Cape Town, a period which could

rightly be seen as the prelude to the Sophiatown years. Also unpublished are the texts of an improvisation dating from the Serpent Players period (*Friday's Bread on Monday,* 1970), and Fugard's second script for camera (*Mille Miglia,* produced on BBC Television in 1968).[10]

The texts which post-date *Dimetos,* which were in preparation at the time of this interview, and which have since appeared before audiences, are Fugard's major works of recent years, *A Lesson from Aloes* (premiered in Johannesburg in November 1978),[11] and his third film with Devenish, *Marigolds in August* (premiered at the Johannesburg Film Festival, May 1980).[12]

The Hough interview, it seems now, came at a time of remarkable stocktaking for Fugard, at a time when much sorting out of the past was summarising itself into, for example, the distillation that was *Aloes*. At this time, at the instigation of friends like Don Maclennan and others, Fugard had also begun to make much early work and large amounts of biographical material open to researchers in the National English Documentation Centre in Grahamstown, which indirectly resulted in the recovery of *No-Good Friday*, of *Nongogo* and of *Tsotsi*, and which will in due course give rise to the researcher's most definitive guide of all coming to hand — the publication of a selection of entries from Fugard's notebooks,[13] which record the day-to-day genesis, drafting, progress, production and publication processes of every work in the entire sequence.

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NOTES

1. This transcript was made in April 1980 on the completion of Hough's study for a master's degree at the Rand Afrikaans University, 'Athol Fugard's First Decade (1958–69): His Early Development.' The tapes are now on file in the National English Documentation Centre, Grahamstown.
2. Mary Benson, 'Keeping an Appointment with the Future: The Theatre of Athol Fugard' (interview), *Theatre Quarterly,* London, Vol. 7, No. 28 (Winter 1977), pp. 77–83.
3. Oxford University Press, 1974, reprinted 1979.
4. *The Blood Knot* (Simondium), *Hello and Goodbye* (Balkema), *Boesman and Lena* (Buren).
5. Russell Vandenbroucke (comp.), *Athol Fugard: Bibliography, Biography and Playography,* Theatre Checklist No. 15 (London: TQ Publications, 1977).
6. With Devenish, *The Guest, an Episode in the Life of Eugène Marais* (Johannesburg: Donker, 1977).
7. The twelfth work, *The Coat,* belongs to the early days of the 'collaborative' phase, and is still in print (with Don Maclennan, *The Third Degree,* Albany Series, Balkema, 1971).

8. In Stephen Gray (ed.), *Theatre One: New South African Drama* (Johannesburg: Donker), and subsequently as *'Orestes* Reconstructed: A Letter to an American Friend,' *Theatre Quarterly,* London, Vol. 8, No. 32 (Winter 1977), pp. 3–6.
9. Dated 1980, for Quagga Press from Donker, Johannesburg and Collings, London. See Stephen Gray, 'The Coming into Print of Athol Fugard's *Tsotsi,' Journal of Commonwealth Literature,* London (forthcoming) for an account of the preparation of *Tsotsi* for print during 1978–9.
10. The first of (to date) five scripts for camera, *The Occupation* first appeared in print in *Contrast,* Cape Town, Vol. 2, No. 4 (April 1964), but remains unproduced. Also in Cosmo Pieterse (ed.), *Ten One-act Plays,* African Writers Series (London: Heinemann Educational, 1968).
11. An hour-long documentary film by Devenish on the rehearsal procedures for *A Lesson from Aloes* was screened by BBC-2 in June 1979.
12. The scripts of *A Lesson from Aloes* and *Marigolds in August* are in preparation for publication.
13. Edited by Fugard and Mary Benson — in progress at the Southern African Research Program, Yale University, New Haven.

INTERVIEW WITH ATHOL FUGARD
Port Elizabeth, 30 November 1977

by BARRIE HOUGH

Of what importance was the theatre experience you gained working with the Circle Players in Cape Town, before you moved to Johannesburg?

FUGARD: I suppose it was really of decisive importance because, up until then, my experience, my knowledge of theatre — particularly of the technical aspect of it — was very, very limited. I'm very representative of that period — like most South Africans I had in fact seen very little theatre up until the time I met Sheila. I knew that it was a medium that interested me and excited me, and I had written one or two radio plays which I'd tried to flog to the SABC and that, but what I'm so conscious of, looking back now, is that those efforts were totally without any real knowledge of the technique. Writing for the stage, theatre writing, requires an incredible degree of craftsmanship — that is most probably true of all media, but I'm very conscious of the degree of craftsmanship involved in writing a play, simply because it's a medium I've ended up having a certain experience of. You've got to make your total statements within a very limited time, you've got very limited physical possibilities. Up until I got involved with Sheila and we started this little group, writing for the stage was just a sort of desire on my side. But starting with Circle Players was definitely the moment when I began to acquire a certain insight into the craftsmanship involved in playwrighting.

Had you written novels or poetry or short stories before that?

FUGARD: Yes, my main interest had been, in fact, poetry. One or two short stories had come out as well. But even then, all of those were in a sort of intensely free prose style, which almost made them like long poems. The question of a novel, which cropped up a bit later in my writing career, hadn't crossed my path; I hadn't attempted a novel yet. But prior to those experiments in writing for the stage there was a fair amount of poetry, none of which, thank God, now exists.

Your first two plays, No-Good Friday *and* Nongogo, *are coming out later this year. How do you feel about their being published so long after being written?*

FUGARD: This is about the only period during which I would have liked to see them published. Up until fairly recently I was so conscious of what the shortcomings of these two plays are — and I still am. They are really apprenticeship plays; they're enormously imitative, they're enormously derivative, they reflect my first excitements at encountering O'Neill, at encountering Tennessee Williams, at meeting plays of that then wave of American drama, like *A Hatful of Rain* and that — the plays of neorealism, you might call it that. I'm still acutely conscious of these total flaws in them, but I just feel myself secure now; I don't feel that their publication and the fact that these flaws would be exposed can in any sense threaten me as a writer. But I've got a body of my own work behind me now, and the fact that these plays are derivative and so on doesn't really bother me.

What was the theatre climate before and at the time of the writing of these two plays?

FUGARD: Well, I can obviously only speak for myself in this connection, but, for what it's worth, let me try to do that. As you will realise, I had just really arrived at a point where I was conscious of what had happened, and what was happening at that time, in a few theatre centres outside of South Africa. And this has gone on, really, I'm afraid, to be a sad truth for me — I've received very little provocation from theatre inside this country itself. I suppose my most positive reaction and provocation at that time came from the writers I've mentioned — obviously O'Neill was already a classic, and Tennessee Williams was the hot one. There were other plays; *A Hatful of Rain* I've mentioned, *Detective Story*. That tough neorealism was very much behind the shaping of *No-Good Friday* and *Nongogo*.

Did you at that time see any Osborne?

FUGARD: I had seen Osborne, but by comparison with the school of American theatre I didn't find myself as provoked. I mean, Osborne's — at that time — shocking use of language wasn't really as exciting for me as the way the Americans were using language . . . I suppose, something else the Americans made me conscious of — but, conversely, Osborne could have done the same thing, yet it was the Americans that did it for me — was . . . well, I'm very certain now, looking back, that I in fact had to find a style to use indigenous material, although I was very excited by the Americans and used them as models, in a way. I knew then, as a principle — I'm certain of this — that it was no good grafting American plays onto South African experience,

that somehow I had to move in on the South African experience as such. And at that point I was totally fascinated by the violence, the excitement, the tempo and the urgency of black township life. And I was looking for a form that would accommodate that. Obviously my experience was so limited that I ended up imitating. But that obviously marks the time at which I first had a sense of telling a uniquely South African story.

Can one say that your job at the Native Commissioner's court was definitive in its influence on the writing of No-Good Friday *and* Nongogo?

FUGARD: Yes, very much so. And definitive even in a much larger context than that. Its effect on just my own relationship to my own country was total. I suppose it was one of the most important — it was depressing, it was awful, it was traumatic — but it was one of *the* important experiences of my life. I left it — angry. Very angry. I don't think I was an angry young man in the sense that Osborne ever was; but I just know — angry, appalled, depressed, but equivalently with such a sense of the need to say certain things, and to say them unequivocally.

The Blood Knot *is very different from its predecessors. To what do you attribute this major change?*

FUGARD: I think unquestionably for me a very decisive juxta-position of a set of very important experiences in a very short period. When I was doing *Nongogo* I had also managed to get my first paying job in theatre, which was to be a stage manager for National Theatre Organisation. I've described how with Circle Players in Cape Town I acquired a certain sense of the craftsmanship involved in theatre, and how the theatre workshop of black actors that I worked with in Johannesburg was a further development of that. And then being a stage manager for National Theatre and actually having my first encounter, my first work with professionals — all right, we might have a few qualifications to make about the sort of plays I was dealing with — but the point is that I was suddenly in the company of professionals —actors like André Huguenet, actors like Bill Brewer, Michael Turner, Peter Hall, Frank Wise, Peter Gildenhuys — and suddenly, very quickly, I was into a further development of my sense of professionalism and craftsmanship in theatre. I had to sit in the wings every night, and I had to watch a play every night; there's a lot of time to sit and think when you're a stage manager. So it was a crash course. I mean, I stage-managed plays like Ionesco, Hugo Claus from Belgium, South African plays — James Am-

brose Brown, oh I can't remember all of them. But it was a concentrated study period for me. And then, immediately after that, there was a further development. We left the country, Sheila and I were in London, and suddenly I was up against a still more refined, more crafted, more professional theatre even, which was English theatre. And then, together with that, came yet another experience in doing original work, which was a period when Sheila and I worked with that Belgian director Tone Brulin, and two other South Africans, David Herbert and his wife Johnny, doing a play that David Herbert had written but in which I acted and which Tone directed, and which we toured through Holland and Belgium. So, in a relatively short period, I suddenly had these three important experiences. So that by the time the first ideas for *Blood Knot* began to cross my mind in London, I'd suddenly enhanced my experience by a thousandfold. There is a seemingly startling move from the still apprenticeship work of *Nongogo* to the much more crafted product of *Blood Knot.*

It has been suggested that The Blood Knot *has an allegorical level of meaning. Was that one of your intentions?*

FUGARD: Not a conscious intention. I can tell you without any hesitation now that the plays I have written have gone on to have their own lives, and they've emerged as being symbolic of this, allegoric of that. And it is an experience which has stayed with me right up until the last thing you saw of mine, which is the Marais film. I can only function, at the simplest level, when there is a story that I want to tell. This question of some of the plays or the films having allegoric levels or symbolic levels, or having other significances — this is something which I do not consciously work for. I mean, with *Blood Knot* I had this image of two brothers, and I just got very obsessed about telling a story. With *Boesman and Lena,* at a certain point, finally it became very clear for me, was the image of a man and a woman, with half of what they'd got on his back and half of what they'd got on her head, and there was a story I wanted to tell. The fact that the story has gone on to have other significances has never been something I work for or work at.

Then, when was the novel, Tsotsi, *written?*

FUGARD (*aside to Sheila*): Before *Blood Knot,* Sheila? It started in . . . I'm very bad on dates, Barrie . . .
SHEILA FUGARD (*off mike*): Tell Barrie I was pregnant and we were coming back from London, and we were staying with Athol's mother.

FUGARD: That's correct, that's why it's written on the back of those old swimming gala programmes.
SHEILA FUGARD: He thought it would be easier to sell, to earn some money.
FUGARD: So when would that be, Sheila?
SHEILA FUGARD: Sixty sixty-one . . .
FUGARD: Sixty-one at least, because on those programmes Barrie saw the date sixty-one. Hang on.
SHEILA FUGARD: No it can't be; it was fifty-nine–sixty. It certainly wasn't written after *Blood Knot* because —
FUGARD: Then I'd made a whole nother commitment . . .

Did the writing of Tsotsi *contribute in any way to the development and clarification of your ideas about drama?*

FUGARD: Hell, I find that a very difficult question to answer, simply because I've forgotten so much. I don't really know. You see, interestingly enough — and I suppose this is about the most significant thing I can say about this — *Tsotsi,* like *No-Good Friday* and *Nongogo,* has got a township setting, a tremendously urgent, desperately urgent and exciting world of gangsters and desperate men — correct? — and it is quite interesting that already, in a sense, *Blood Knot* represents a move away from that. It is almost true that — I suppose it's true — that, up until *Sizwe Bansi,* I did not return to a black township. Because *Blood Knot* isn't a black township. *Tsotsi* is in that line, of that peculiar urgency of Sophiatown, you know, which excited us both when we first encountered it, but it seems that it almost exhausted my interest in that world as a medium for myself as a writer. I think that's about the most significant thing I can say, looking back on *Tsotsi* as I do now. You see, what is interesting is that I can remember details and specifics so much more clearly about *Nongogo* and *No-Good Friday* that precede *Tsotsi* . . . I can not for the life of me remember any moment that I spent at a table writing that thing, and obviously there were a lot of moments, because there's a fair amount of writing on paper there.

Well, just one more thing about Tsotsi. *There is in* Tsotsi *this theme that man can only really experience his existence through pain.*

FUGARD: That's correct.

Now, that same theme occurs to an extent in The Blood Knot *as well.*

FUGARD: Correct.

So would you say that Tsotsi *is closer to* The Blood Knot *than to* Nongogo, *for instance?*

FUGARD: Oh yes, very definitely, then, very definitely . . .
SHEILA FUGARD: It's a logical thing.
FUGARD: Yes, and, you see, that remark you've just made about pain; it is the most important thing that latched me onto the very last thing that I've done at this moment, which is the Marais film. Because, you know, one of the major Marais statements was that all living, survival, is grounded on pain. Ja, that's right, it's really a theme that has gone through all my work; it's the string that holds all the beads together to make a necklace.

Have you completely abandoned the novel as form?

FUGARD: Oh yes . . . I've ended up, if I've ended up with anything, with a sense of the craft that various forms require; I mean I'm *passionately* conscious about the craft that goes into writing a play, and to the extent that I've got that I'm very conscious of the craft that goes into creating other literary forms, or of working successfully in other literary forms. I'm only too conscious of it — I mean, I live with a novelist and I'm only too conscious of her struggle, as I'm conscious of my continuing struggle as a playwright; I'm acutely conscious of the craftsmanship that is required of a novel because, although I've stopped writing them, I haven't stopped reading them, or stopped reading poems. I haven't mastered those tools; I had them in my hands once, briefly, but I don't know how to use them. I wouldn't know how to start to write a novel. I think it would be a terrible conceit on my side to start now. I'm not saying it's a conceit on anybody else's side to try to write a novel at the age of forty-six–forty-seven — how old?
SHEILA FUGARD: Forty-five.
FUGARD: Oh, forty-five. — to write a novel at the age of forty-five. But it would be a conceit on my side. Only with the greatest difficulty do I still find myself struggling with a relatively new experience in my writing career, which is writing for film. I'm still struggling to understand just what the freedoms are, and the limitations.

You have previously talked about Faulkner — how important was he to you?

FUGARD: Well, I haven't read a Faulkner for a long time, but he was an absolutely decisive experience for me. I can't remember what my first Faulkner was and I don't remember when it was,

but there was obviously for me just this one remarkable discovery, at a certain point in my life, of a great writer who had taken the very simple, very specific stories, and had made astonishing literature out of it. And, more than anybody else, Faulkner turned me around in the sense that, where I'd been looking at American plays and where I then found myself looking at European plays and European experiments, suddenly he gave me total security to turn around and look at the specifics, the humble specifics of an Eastern Province world — well, made me secure in my love of those specifics, made me hand myself over to my love, love of a region, of a place, of my passion for it. And to say, look, if you're going to be a good storyteller, there's enough here for you. He gave me a total sense of security in the specifics of my place and my time. It was a security that was — challenged. You know we first did *The Blood Knot* in South Africa, and *The Blood Knot* is my first saying — look, a man has walked through the Karroo, Korsten is this, the specifics are Port Elizabeth. I just handed myself over to that. We did it here and it was then very successful in South Africa. Then we tried it for the first time in London, and it got some really good notices in London, but it turned out to be a bit of a commercial disaster. (There were also a couple of very bad notices!) And when I came back to South Africa after that experience, a lot of people tried to understand why this play, which had been so successful in South Africa, had failed overseas. And they all came to the conclusion that I had been too specific, that in fact if I wanted to succeed overseas I must water down the specific South African tone — there were just too many things that could only be understood by us in South Africa, they decided; and this was in fact their advice to me then — you are potentially a reasonable writer, but if you want to go on and make your mark, and make your mark overseas, you must water it down. This is advice I totally rejected. I have never in my writing made any concessions to the fact that the play might be seen by overseas audiences. I've always just taken on one thing: I am writing a play about South Africa for South Africans.

One question now which is perhaps rather technical. In your use of Afrikaans words and phrases, do you try and suggest to the audience that these people are now talking Afrikaans, or is it just a word or phrase to give a specific mood?

FUGARD: It's a good question. I'm just trying to sort that one out for myself. I suppose the truth really is that . . . I'm looking at this moment at, let's say for example, Boesman and Lena, and I'm also thinking of Johnnie and Hester in *Hello and Goodbye.*

Now this is an interesting question you ask me: am I in fact trying to suggest that, although I'm writing in English, this is actually something taking place in Afrikaans, or, as you then went on to formulate very accurately, am I just using these Afrikaans turns of phrase just to capture certain little nuances? I suppose one of the problems I had, specifically with a play like *Boesman and Lena,* was that I think I was conscious all the way through it that I was trying to do a very difficult thing — which was to tell the story of these two people in English language, when in a sense Afrikaans would have been possibly a richer medium. With *Hello and Goodbye,* no — those Smits down in Valley Road — that's a very strange . . . that's sort of half-English, half-Afrikaans, and I used a very corrupt English there. I didn't have the same sense of struggling as I did in *Boesman and Lena.* But with *Boesman and Lena* specifically I can remember having a sense on my side that, hell man, actually you know, really it should almost be in Afrikaans. It's a point a lot of people have made to me, as well, that the play was in fact translated before it was written!

After the sixties and Boesman and Lena, *your approach to drama seems to have altered. In what way did* The Coat *and* Orestes *contribute to this?*

FUGARD: Well, *The Coat* and *Orestes* reflect something more than contribute. What they reflect is a sort of sense on my side that . . . you're quite right . . . it sort of began to manifest itself after *Boesman and Lena* and particularly during the productions I did in South Africa and in London of this play. I found myself rather — what's the word — frustrated. I began to find myself blocked by this process which had worked reasonably well up to then, which was me as a writer disappearing from the world for whatever length of period I needed, reappearing with a play, looking at actors, choosing actors, going into a rehearsal room, rehearsing, and boom — there's the production. I just began to find myself blocked by that; there was a certain creative block. And *The Coat* and *Orestes* reflect my attempt — and it was by and large a successful experiment for me — to break that creative block by suddenly using the creativity of the actor. Instead of thinking of the actor as just an interpretive artist, there was the possibility of thinking of the actor as a creative artist. Now I've spoken about *The Coat* and *Orestes* as reflecting this dilemma, or this little crisis, for a moment, but the important influence that led me into exploring this avenue was the Polish theatre man, Grotowski. This was a man who had developed to an astonishing degree a theatre that used the creative potential of the actor.

And it was *his* influence that really blew my mind at that stage, and suddenly he set me off into a set of encounters with actors, which starting with *The Coat* led through *Orestes,* and then culminated, in a sense, in *Sizwe Bansi,* and to a lesser degree in *The Island,* and then suddenly flowered again for me in *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act.* And, equivalently, in exactly the same way as one experience ended with *Boesman and Lena,* and then this other experience which we've talked about started, that experience ended for me with *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act.* A sort of a new thing then started — what the new thing is all about I don't know, because I'm still in the process of living my way through it.

Then to what extent did Dimetos *represent a move away from your earlier work?*

FUGARD: It represented a total attempt to give my life as a writer a completely new direction. I've told you that at the end of *Boesman and Lena* I arrived at a sense of being blocked and dry, and tried to regenerate myself, and I succeeded in doing so for a period by going into a collaboration with the actor, which I hadn't had in my work before — to repeat myself, I'd used the actor in a purely illustrative way. Now I'd worked with the actor's own creative potential. But that experience also suddenly led to a creative block, even though it was a very rich and rewarding experience working with actors in this new way. But I again found myself, in a sense, in a cul-de-sac. The experience wasn't satisfying enough. It had ended the way the cycle with *Boesman and Lena* had ended — suddenly that experience was not releasing things in me that needed to be released. When I came to the end of that experience — and the last one in the second cycle was *Statements* — I had a very real sense that I now wanted to go back to myself just as a writer again. Obviously to go on working with actors — but I wanted to go back to being very private, with myself and a blank paper. And *Dimetos* represents my first attempt to return to that — well, not even to return, because obviously if it is a question of returning to something, I hope it is returning to something at a higher level, at a higher plane. I'm still in the throes of that experience, so it's very hard for me to be conscious of how either successful or how rewarding or how meaningful it is. But I suppose the things that have happened to me in terms of this new sense of myself are *Dimetos* and the Marais film, *The Guest.* Both of them are still very, very close to me, and I certainly know that I haven't exhausted the sense of myself that I have at this moment.

I do notice, in The Guest *especially, that these are extremely poetical works; in* The Guest *in its use of imagery and in its sparseness. Do you think that you are moving in a more poetic direction?*

FUGARD: That could well be, because I was very conscious of a return to my life of — putting it in brackets — poetry with *Dimetos*. And the adjectives you've used to describe *The Guest* are, I think, adjectives that would apply to *Dimetos* as a play. It is certainly very sparse; it is stripped down to bare essentials, and there is just the very necessary line to evoke the sense of the whole. My answer to your question is emphatically yes, there is a return to poetry, but with discipline, with certainly more discipline than ever before in my life; certainly more purified, simpler, more reduced to essentials of a certain poetic bent that I — well, it's no accident that the one thing I still find myself reading with total consistency is poetry. You know, as time passes I neglect my reading in a lot of other directions, but poetry I still cannot live without.

Did your work with Ross Devenish on Boesman and Lena *lead to* The Guest?

FUGARD: Unquestionably. It led to *The Guest* at two levels. Firstly, we — both of us — are very conscious of how flawed *Boesman and Lena* is as a film. We took on the impossible task — and I think it just about is impossible — which was transferring a play into a film. Novels work as films, but plays are plays, and they transfer with great, great difficulty into that medium. What we did have a sense of while we were making *Boesman and Lena* was, in fact, that we were using film in this country in a way that hasn't often been used — which was, again, to tell that Faulkner-regional story; not to be ashamed of ourselves and the facts about our world, our specifics. I mean, so much of the South African film output is purely derivative, imitative of other people's films. And so we were conscious of trying to tell a simple South African story and, as I say, whatever its flaws might be, it was an encouraging enough experience to make us attempt to try and tell another one. So, at that level, it led to the Marais. Equally important, though, is the fact that it was my first experience with a film. It was again one of those crash courses that I talked about earlier. I mean, I ended up, after *Boesman and Lena,* knowing a hell of a lot more about the medium than I did when I started. And obviously I tried to put that knowledge to use, firstly in writing the Marais script, and secondly in terms of acting it.

Have you ever thought about TV as a medium? I saw your People are Living There *on South African TV, and I thought that the confines of the box conveyed that claustrophobic atmosphere which is in most of your plays.*

FUGARD: Yes, I have thought a hell of a lot about it, and haven't really done anything about my interest there, for one very simple reason: I myself, technically, know nothing about it. I think I would know how to write it, but I myself am not equipped, simply because I don't have the knowledge, of how to direct a television play. So I would be dependent on another director. And I haven't actually met a television director with whom I felt as safe as I have felt, say, with Ross Devenish as a film director. I mean, I would have no hesitation in handing myself over to trying to write another film script, knowing that I was going to work with Ross, because I trust Ross's judgement. Now I don't have a relationship like that in my life in terms of television. If it came to writing another play for the stage, which I intend doing, then obviously I'm going to direct it myself, so I don't have a problem there. I don't have a problem in terms of film, because I've got this friendship and collaboration with Ross Devenish. But I do not have that friendship and collaboration with anybody in television, and I would hate to write something and hand it over to somebody who's going to make a bloody mess of it.

If you think back over your whole career, which one play do you single out as being the closest to you? Of which play do you think with the most warmth?

FUGARD: I will answer that question, but I will answer it only up until the plays that end with *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act.* Because *Dimetos* is still too close and too complex an experience for me to understand what my relationship to it is; it is also, in a way, a very personal play. But in terms of everything that goes from the beginning to *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act,* I'll say two things. I have a sense that my most finely crafted play, just best constructed, is *Boesman and Lena.* The play which sort of lurks in my life, though, as the one that I think could still move me more than any of the others, or maybe just has a peculiar thing about it, which is really to answer the question you're asking, would be *Statements after an Arrest under the Immorality Act.* And what is the reason for that? The reason for that — it's like a sort of bridge play for me. Firstly, in terms of doing it. Unlike *Sizwe Bansi* and *The Island* — because it's those three plays together — but, unlike those two, suddenly the writer came to have a certain ascendancy in

that play. But at the same time my relationship in the rehearsal room with Yvonne Bryceland, the relationship in London with Yvonne Bryceland and Ben Kingsley contributed the most enormously decisive elements in the final shape of the thing. A third factor is that that play has got — and this is why it doesn't enjoy many performances, because the difficult things are never the popular things — that play has got, unlike *Sizwe Bansi* and *The Island,* which are relatively straightforward, some very dark and very ambiguous imagery in it. And I think that the sort of poetry that you were talking about, speaking in terms of *Dimetos* and *The Guest,* is already there in *Statements.* Its textures, especially when they start in the second half of the play to just drop into their nightmares of those split-seconds when the camera flashes and they're being photographed by the police — their exploration of those seconds of consciousness have for me personally, at this point, the density, the ambiguity of poetry.

There have been questions of how writers use metaphors of this and that, in the Theatre of the Absurd, in the Angry Theatre, and so on. How would you feel if I said that your metaphor is reality?

FUGARD: Um, I'd — I'd feel very good. Yes, I'd feel pretty good if you said that.

In an interview with Don Maclennan, he spoke about facts, and you said that what was more important to you than facts were the warm substantialities of a character's life — does he smoke a pipe? does he wear slippers?

FUGARD: Yes . . .

In that sense, do you still use reality as your metaphor?

FUGARD: Yes. Yes, very definitely. Very definitely.

(Ends)

LA SENSATION VISUELLE DANS 'LA QUESTE DEL SAINT GRAAL'

by FERN ROSETTA

Un relevé des cinq sens classiques dans *La Queste del Saint Graal* a indiqué la fréquence de la sensation visuelle mise en relief par la couleur. Les nombreux songes, visions et manifestations surnaturelles appelaient une série de remarques sur l'élément visuel qui, de par ses associations et correspondances avec les autres sens, s'est avéré être le plus riche dans le champ sensoriel. Pour disposer d'une base d'étude comparative, il est nécessaire de retenir, en plus de l'oeuvre principale *La Queste, le Perceval* de Chrétien de Troyes, *le Roman de l'Estoire du Graal* de Robert de Boron, ainsi que *la mort Artu* qui forme non seulement la suite de *La Queste* mais aussi l'épilogue du cycle des romans arthuriens. Nous étudierons les différents aspects de la sensation visuelle dans un ordre principalement dicté par la logique. Le regard exprime le rapport physique entre les yeux et le monde visible; la vision élargit les perspectives, en enrichissant le réel par l'apport de l'interprétation figurative.

Pour apprécier la pensée du Moyen-Age, le lecteur moderne doit s'efforcer de comprendre le concept du *sacré* qui domine cet univers très différent du sien. En s'adaptant à cette mentalité spécifiquement chrétienne, il pourra non seulement accéder à un domaine d'une richesse intellectuelle variée, mais aussi apprécier la valeur humaine de cette période, gouvernée et marquée par l'Eglise. La croyance à un double aspect des phénomènes caractérise l'univers médiéval. Le monde est conçu comme une réalité créée par Dieu, pour que l'homme, en le contemplant, puisse y apercevoir le reflet du divin et comprendre qu'il existe des correspondances entre ce monde réel et un autre monde qui, lui, est surnaturel et parfait. Afin d'expliquer les attaches métaphysiques qui relient la création au Créateur, l'Eglise a eu recours à des moyens qui rappellent les principes de la pensée néoplatonicienne. Elle a utilisé, tout comme Saint Augustin, la forme, les couleurs et les nombres ou plus spécialement la sensation visuelle dont le caractère à la fois agréable et utile est de-puis toujours universellement reconnu. L'emprise des représentations visuelles, qu'elles prennent la forme de fresques ou de vitraux, est encore très forte à la fin du Moyen-Age. Villon nous en a apporté le témoignage émouvant dans *La Ballade pour prier Notre Dame.*[1]

'Au moutiers vois, dont suis paroissienne
Paradis peint, où sont harpes et luths,
Et un enfer où damnés sont bollus:
L'un me fait peur, l'autre joie et liesse.'

L'auteur de *La Queste* suivra l'exemple de l'Eglise en s'attachant à une instruction qui se fonde sur le visible, que ce soit par la forme picturale de l'allégorie ou par le symbole. L'allégorie sera le procédé littéraire favorisé par le narrateur, l'idée abstraite qu'elle représente se prête au déchiffrage par les ermites, dont l'élucidation permet de renforcer l'impression première par une narration détaillée illustrée de comparaisons et d'exemples concrets tirés de l'Ecriture Sainte. Le symbole, par contre, traduit une signification conventionnelle directement accessible à l'intelligence, qui, néanmoins, retient, comme l'allégorie, une valeur visuelle puisque ce symbole s'exprime par une marque, une figure. A travers une esthétique et un symbolisme dont le christianisme détenait la clé, l'Eglise était sûre de toucher ou d'intéresser à la fois trois catégories d'hommes ainsi définis par Origène: ceux qui obéissent aux sens, ceux que guide la raison, ceux qui poursuivent l'Abstraction. L'auteur de *La Queste* exploitera le domaine sensoriel en jouant sur le registre de la sensibilité, qualité commune à tous les êtres, à des degrés différents. Visant à émouvoir pour mieux prêcher, il retrouve par là même les deux axes de la Rhétorique: *movere, docere.*

Au XIIIème siècle, on verra l'allégorie devenir un procédé de rhétorique autant qu'une manière de comprendre la vie. Il s'agit du passage de la pure sensibilité à l'abstraction, guidée par la Raison, ou plutôt *avec l'assentiment de la raison. La Psychomachie* du poète Prudence (pp. 348–405), *Les Noces de Mercure et de Philologie* de Martianus Capella avaient largement contribué à répandre le goût de l'allégorie qui offrait aux écrivains une source d'inspiration ainsi qu'un moyen de communication idéal: elle permettait de réconcilier le monde sensible et le monde mystique. Les attributs humains, ainsi que certaines formes de la nature animale et végétale qui y sont personnifiées, font appel à l'imagination créatrice. D. Poirion parle 'd'une sorte de mise en scène fantastique.'[2] Par sa forme picturale, l'allégorie apparaît comme un moyen privilégié pour entreprendre une étude des sensations. La représentation allégorique offre une analogie entre la sensation évoquée par la langue sensible et l'idée que l'image est censée représenter.[3]

Sous l'influence de la pensée de Denis l'Aéropagite, qui déjà au Ier siècle avait introduit un concept hiérarchique de l'univers, on remarquera qu'au XIIIème siècle une distinction bien définie s'etablit entre les sens supérieurs et inférieurs. Ceci est particu-

lièrement évident dans *La Queste*. L'auteur, à la suite des nombreux évènements d'ordre surnaturel qui s'y déroulent, a dû prévoir les excès de la spéculation fantaisiste des lecteurs et, à tout moment la parole des ermites leur rappelle que le monde est agencé par la puissance divine; l'auteur veut établir un lien entre des évènements qui, autrement, pourraient être interprétés de façon disparate. C'est ainsi que tous les épisodes allégoriques renvoient à cette vérité générale qui gouverne le roman, à savoir le triomphe du Bien sur le Mal, opposition abstraite qui est illustrée et renforcée par la différentiation concrète des sens supérieurs et inférieurs. Ainsi, les mots rattachés à la famille du verbe *voir* et ses variantes peuvent assumer, au XIIIème siècle, soit une valeur concrète de regarder ou d'observer, soit une valeur abstraite qui traduit une perception concrète du surnaturel. De même les termes songe, vision et avision n'ont jamais la valeur péjorative que leur confèrent certains auteurs de la fin du XVIème siècle pour qui la vision n'est qu'un simple ressort dramatique, associé à l'exagération, la terreur et la folie.[4]

L'absence marquée de passages purement pittoresques dans *La Queste* est due au fait que l'auteur a toujours conscience du message qu'il doit transmettre aux hommes par l'intermédiaire de la parole des ermites. Le regard de l'homme, à l'opposé de celui de Satan, est limité. Le diable, bien que déchu, a gardé le privilège de l'être céleste: il peut *veoir apertement* la faiblesse de l'homme et, de ce fait, il le rend aveugle à la vérité, en jouant sur cette faiblesse, par des tentations infernales. Lancelot apprend que c'est le regard de Guenièvre et le 'darz'[5] du diable qui l'ont entraîné à commetre l'adultère. Les yeux sont ici les interprètes du coeur; ils peuvent donc exprimer les désirs des sensations inférieures telles que la luxure 'car si tost come tu eus tes eulz eschaufer de l'ardor de la luxure'.[6] Satan, lui-même, reste invisible à l'homme. Ici, appelé par un ermite, il prend la forme d'une figure laide, ailleurs, Lancelot n'entend que sa voix horrible, il ne peut voir son corps. Le pécheur en particulier connaîtra la détresse la plus abjecte à cause des limites de son sens visuel. Ainsi Lancelot ne peut discerner entre le rêve et la réalité ou vérité de la vision, lorsque, par exemple, après avoir assisté au miracle du Chevalier guéri par le Graal, il ne sait si 'ce qu'il a veu a este songe ou veritez'.[7] La voix divine l'éclaire aussitôt, mais son manque de foi ainsi que ses péchés ne lui permettront pas de voir les merveilles du Graal, car cette faveur est réservée aux élus, ceux qui bénéficient du regard de Dieu. De même, pendant le cortège du Graal, le Saint Vase passe devant les chevaliers, mais ceux-ci peuvent voir qui le porte. Seule la main de Dieu est visible, lorsqu'à la mort de Galaad, elle vient reprendre l'épée et le vase sacrés.

Le double sens du verbe *regarder* est explicite dans le passage où les chevaliers lisent un avertissement inscrit sur la nef merveilleuse et qui leur en défend l'entrée s'ils sont en état de péché: 'qui que tu soies *resgardes* que tu soies pleins de foi . . . '.[8] 'Regardes' signifie ici à la fois: examine ta conscience, (il s'agit du regard intérieur de la conscience), et prends garde si tu ne l'es pas. Bien que l'homme puisse tromper autrui, il ne peut se dissimuler sa faute à lui-même ni à Dieu. Etre omniscient par excellence; c'est pourquoi Adam et Eve tentèrent en vain de se cacher dans le jardin d'Eden. Donc, si la connaissance de soi est à la base de toute connaissance, les religieux et l'Ecriture Sainte seront les guides de l'homme au cours de sa quête. Le précepte socratique (gnôthi seauton) trouve ici sa justification et associe la sagesse antique au christianisme.

Les yeux et plus particulièrement les larmes peuvent être révélatrices de la vérité totale de l'homme. Ainsi quand le roi Artu assiste au départ de ses chevaliers pour la Quête, il exprime sa vive douleur: 'Je ne puis en moi veoir comment je m'en puisse soffrir. . . en cel penser li viennent les larmes as eulz'.[9] Les larmes suggèrent un rapport direct entre le coeur et l'esprit ou la pensée. Signe d'humanité et d'humilité totales, mais plus encore manifestation de la rencontre avec Dieu, comme le montre si bien une histoire du XIIIème siècle: *Le Chevalier au Barisel.*[10] Le narrateur révèle qu'une seule larme d'humilité assure le salut de l'homme, la larme représente le lien entre ce qui est vu et ressenti et symbolise l'intercession divine. Qu'il s'agisse des joies ou des peines les plus profondes, c'est par les yeux que l'homme révèle ses émotions à autrui. L'auteur nous rappelle aussi la métaphore de l'oeil, miroir de l'âme. L'importance du regard est établie depuis les premières pages de *La Queste* quand Gauvain jure d'entreprendre la Quête pour *veoir plus apertement* les merveilles du Graal, les autres chevaliers suivent le même exemple. Il est intéressant de noter la réaction du roi, quand celui-ce 'vit qu'il avoient fet tel veu, si en fu molt malese'. La teneur verbale du serment est au moins aussi importante que le témoignage visuel. L'auteur revalorise le verbe voir par l'adjonction de l'adverbe *apertement*. Cette expression, qui devient le leit-motiv des progrès spirituels des chevaliers, signifie voir avec les yeux bien ouverts et clairement et traduit à la fois l'idée de connaître, donc de faire l'expérience totale de la plénitude et des merveilles surnaturelles. Nous avons noté que le diable peut aussi 'voir *apertement*', mais il ne peut *jouir*; le sens d'*apertement* est donc restreint dans ce cas. Ce qu'il *voit apertement*, ce sont les intentions et les actions de l'homme, mais l'absence de toute lumière divine, due aux ténèbres du péché ne lui permet plus de jouir de la plénitude de la grâce à laquelle l'homme par contre, peut encore aspirer. La

lumière représent le mystère du monde visible à partir de l'invisible qui se révèle à nous par la vision transmise par une source lumineuse. Cependant, l'homme a surtout besoin d'une lumière divine, la lumière de l'esprit symbolise la présence divine qui permet à l'homme de voir *apertement* et aux élus de connaître ce qui ne peut être décrit. La vérité est donc symbolisée par la lumière et le sens propre de l'expression *voir apertement* est toujours sous-entendu et enrichi du sens figurè de la parole du Christ. 'Je suis la lumière du monde',[11] 'Je suis la voie, la vérité et la vie'.[12] Ainsi *voir apertement* implique non seulement un état de fait, mais une direction à prendre; voir pour élucider la vérité. C'est ainsi que l'auteur de *La Queste* fait passer une sensation concrète à une donnée de la conscience métaphysique. Pour voir *apertement,* le chevalier devra donc se détourner du monde extérieur et, par un regard intérieur, se concentrer sur des progrès d'ordre spirituel. Ce ne sont ni l'observation des choses matérielles qui l'environnent, ni le regard d'autrui, qui pourront éclairer le chevalier; il devra en fait se méfier du monde matériel, car le diable s'en sert comme instrument de tentation. Seul l'oeil intérieur de la conscience peut l'aider dans son acheminement vers le salut.

Lors des apparitions du Graal, l'éclat des objets sacrés faits d'or, d'argent, et de pierreries réfléchit la luminosité mystique du saint vase. Les pierres précieuses qui ornent les objects sacrés, tels que l'épée, l'arche, le Saint Vase et le Graal, combinent la lumière et la couleur. La première impression suscitée par l'imagination créatrice est un rayonnement intérieur plutôt qu'une représentation de pierres de diverses couleurs. G. Bachelard a suggéré que des cristaux, par leur transparence, émane une lumière qui hypnotise; ceci est surtout vrai du diamant: 'c'est une pierre de la force du regard'.[13] En effet, l'imagination visuelle conçoit plus facilement et plus immédiatement un éclat de lumière dont la teinte varie selon la sensibilité du lecteur, qu'une évocation de différentes pierres précieuses ayant chacune une couleur précise. La richesse et la beauté matérielles dépendent donc de la lumière qui irradie. L'arc-en-ciel, par exemple, suggère une courbe d'une luminosité indistinctement colorée: l'oeil ne perçoit pas l'image des sept couleurs distinctes, tant le dégradé est parfait. C'est ainsi qu'il faut interpréter l'apparence ocellée des diverses sources de lumière: la courbe des cieux, le soleil, la lune, la couronne, le vase et l'auréole de la flamme des cierges. L'auteur de *La Queste* s'efforce toujours de mettre en évidence la puissance supérieure de la lumière divine. Ainsi, Lancelot, réveillé par elle une nuit, croit que le jour est venu.

L'absence de lumière dans l'âme, par contre, résulte des ténèbres, du péché et rappelle à l'homme sa nature inférieure, car,

tout comme l'ennemi par son péché, il doit se sentir à l'écart de la lumière divine. En l'absence d'un être divin, la nuit est le symbole le plus ancien du Mal. Les ténèbres sont alors synonymes du péché de l'enfer et de son maître, le Prince des Ténèbres, qui assume les formes les plus diverses. L'attribut qui le désigne généralement est la couleur noire. Le pécheur qui vit dans cette nuit connaîtra la tentation, l'effroi, l'aveuglement, loin de Dieu, dans l'ombre de la mort que la nuit engendre. Par exemple, Bohort ne peut voir *cler* 'mes mi oil qui sont si terrein . . . ne pueet veoir les esperitex choses nel me lessent outrement veoir ainz m'en tolert la veraie semblance.'[14] D'autre part, le péché obscurcit le regard de l'homme, la lumière divine ne filtre pas à travers la fumée qui entoure l'être impur et ne peut être transmise à l'âme si bien que le pécheur est privé des joies célestes. Ceux qui, en dépit de leur péché et du commandement de Dieu, s'efforcent de voir les merveilles du Saint Graal seront aveuglés. Au sens propre, ils perdent la vue comme ils l'ont perdue au sens figuré et symbolique. Lancelot perd la vue (et ses forces) pour avoir fait preuve de vanité et de curiosité. Dieu apparaît au roi Mordrain dans une nuée, qui ici ne signifie pas la protection bienfaisante, mais le châtiment de Dieu qui cache sa face. Le roi ne recouvrera la vue que lors de la visitation messianique de Galaad. L'aveuglement représente le châtiment suprême, puisque le pécheur ne peut même plus participer à la beauté de la création. Cependant, sa cécité, sa non-vision, l'obligera à analyser son être intérieur, à faire un examen de conscience par lequel il peut aspirer à nouveau à la lumière de la vérité, mais c'est Dieu seul qui pourra lui rendre la vue. Le cierge que Gauvain a vu dans une vision représente la vérité de l'Evangile: 'ce est Jesus Christ qui rend clarté et veue'.[15] Cette cécité physique qui afflige certains pécheurs symbolise l'aveuglement métaphysique, ceci est démontré lorsqu'un ermite explique à Galaad que les pécheurs, endurcis par leurs fautes, sont à jamais aveugles 'en l'avènement Jhesuscrist',[165] qu'ils ne le reconnaissent pas comme le messie. Ne pouvant voir *cler*, ils écoutent sans comprendre et obéissent au diable. *Voir* au sens propre et au sens figuré est donc un privilège qu'il faut sauvegarder.

Pour tout chevalier qui jouit de la *vue*, l'importance primordiale de cette sensation est illustrée par l'expression 'il *vit* ceste *avision*. 'Les visions sont de nature prophétique dans *La Queste*. Elles représentent des expériences d'ordre spirituel. Les termes vision, songe et apparition ne désignent ni l'instrument visuel d'une part, ni la fiction ni la fantaisie d'autre part; ce ne sera qu'au XVIIème Siècle, à la suite des *Mèditations* de Descartes que le lien étroit entre la réalité et le domaine du rêve sera établi. Si l'image de la vision dans *La Queste* a un rapport avec la

réalité, c'est dans une perspective purement allégorique et théophanique. Pour l'homme du Moyen-Age, *voir c'était croire.* Il n'est donc pas étonnant que l'auteur ait choisi de terminer son roman par une phrase qui garantisse l'authenticité des faits: 'Et quand Bohort ot contee les aventures del Saint Graal telle come il les avoit veues si furent mises en escrit.'[17] Nous sommes bien prés ici de l'esprit du quatrième évangile dans lequel Jean se présente comme un témoin de la vérité. La vision devient le signe du témoignage de la Foi. Le verbe *voir* est souvent employé au sens de *comprendre* et de *témoigner.* Il n'est que de considérer le passage dans lequel l'ermite élucide les données toujours précises de l'*avision* du chevalier. Il dit à Lancelot lors de *l'Aventure de la Tombe,*' or devons *veoir* comment ceste semblance et cele de lors s'entracordent. La tombe senefie . . .'[18] De même, Galaad explique que le roi et ses chevaliers sont venus de l'abbaye où aura lieu l'aventure de l'écu pour être témoins de ce qu'ils ont entendu dire: 'i venismes pour *veoir* une aventure qui i est trop merveilleuse'.[19]

Lorsque l'auteur de *La Queste* emploie plus spécifiquement le mot *avision* c'est pour désigner le songe que fait le chevalier au cours de la nuit. Ces songes sont des allégories dirigées vers un cas, une circonstance, un homme particuliers, puis il a recours aux ermites pour comprendre la *senefience* merveilleuse des réponses reçues. L'*avision* est décrite à l'ermite comme une scène vécue au cours d'un sommeil troublé. Hector et Gauvain qui dans *La Queste* sont les deux réprouvés, alarmés par leurs rêves, se réveillent et entendent la voix de Dieu qui les condamne; en même temps, ils voient une main portant un cierge et un frein passer devant eux. Cette avision leur indique qu'ils ne connaîtront point d'extase. Les *avisions* invitent le chevalier à réfléchir sur son expérience visuelle et à suivre les instructions de l'ermite qui en éclaire les données. Le message est rendu clair, grâce à la vision initiale; nous y voyons la culmination du système dormeur-avision, consultation-interprétation de l'expérience visuelle.

Nous avons noté que la vue et les connaissances de l'homme dépendent de la lumière, c'est grâce à elle qu'il voit *cler*; s'il s'agit d'une vision surnaturelle, celle-ci sera enrichie par le rayonnement des anges, des astres, en particulier par le soleil qui symbolise le Christ. La prééminence du soleil sur les autres astres est exprimée par un ermite dans une comparaison hyperbolique: quand un fils de roi devient chevalier, il doit faire preuve d'une bonté qui surpasse celle des autres 'com li rais del soleil apert sur les estoiles'.[20] Il s'agit naturellement du meilleur chevalier Galaad. La suprématie de la vue sur les autres sens se trouve explicitée par Galaad après son extase tant désirée: 'car or voi je tot apertement ce que langue ne paroit descrire, ne cuer penser ici

voi je les merveilles de toutes les merveilles'.[21] Sa joie est telle qu'il demande à Dieu de lui accorder la mort car la vision béatifique incite l'homme à rejoindre Dieu dans l'autre monde. Dans un élan spirituel, les sensations autres que la vue sont oubliées. L'extase est un état ressenti par l'âme. Elle dépend de la vision suprême et accède à l'âme par les yeux, elle représente donc l'apogée de toute expérience visuelle et rappelle que les autres sensations purement extérieures ne sont que des attaches terrestres. La vue dont dépend le regard et qui anime les visions est donc le sens le plus abstrait, si l'on peut oser cette association de termes, le sens qui se prête plus que tout autre à l'abstraction. Plus l'homme se détachera du monde physique et matériel, plus l'union mystique pourra être intime. Celui en qui le feu du Saint Esprit brûle attire la lumière divine. C'est ainsi que Galaad, l'élu, connaîtra l'extase la plus complète. Après avoir 'vu' le Graal, de ses yeux vu, de son âme vu, il pourra *voir* la sainte face de Dieu, le privilège réservé aux élus.

Nous pouvons donc conclure que dans *La Queste* la vue est le sens le plus important. C'est la sensation visuelle qui permet aux héros de voir leur progression spirituelle vers le salut, que ce soit au sens propre ou au sens figuré, ce dernier étant le plus fréquent. Ce qui est *vu* par les yeux est décodé par les yeux de l'esprit et selon les préceptes acceptés du Dogme de l'Eglise. Le regard de l'homme recueille à la fois la perception et le jugement en une prise de conscience globale; la vue est donc le sens le plus rationnel et celui qui se prête le mieux à la transcendance. La fréquence et l'importance de l'élément visuel, le symbolisme lié à la couleur et à la lumière ont indiqué combien cette sensation est prééminente. Elle nous a permis d'appréhender avec efficacité les idées spirituelles que l'auteur rend sensibles. En définitive, le dessein des oeuvres de *La Queste* ne se borne pas au simple plaisir, mais fait appel aux yeux de l'intelligence. Si galvaudé que soit le mot, c'est de message qu'il s'agit ici. Joie et paix, voilà les axes des discours des différents textes à des niveaux divers certes, mais toujours prêts à affleurer grâce à l'appel à la sensation visuelle en particulier.

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3. A Longthorpe Manor, une fresque animale du XIVème siècle symbolise les cinq sens sous forme animale; seule la vue est représentée par un animal noble: le coq; cet animal est retenu pour sa vigilance dans la Bible et le Talmud ainsi que dans de nombreuses hymnes chrétiennes où il est comparé à un roi ou à un chevalier. (Rythme sur le coq du clocher de Spire, XIVème siècle). Des animaux vils, tels le singe, le vautour, l'araignée et le verrat désignent respectivement le goût, l'odorat, le toucher et l'ouïe. Fresque citée dans *Le Bestiaire scupté en France* Debidour V, Arthaud, Paris, 1961, p. 309.
4. Montaigne, *Les Essais,* Pléiade: LI, Chap. XXVII, p. 178. '. . . si j'oyais parler ou des esprits qui reviennent, ou du prognostique des choses futures, des enchantements, des sorcelleries . . . il me venoit compassion du pauvre peuple abusé de ces folies.'
5. *Queste*, p. 125, l 31.
6. Ibid., p. 126, ll 3–4.
7. Ibid., p. 61, l 9.
8. Ibid., p. 201, ll 12–13.
9. Ibid., p. 17, l 14.
10. *Le Chevalier au Barisel* de Jean de la Chapelle. Resumé de l'article paru dans *Littérature Francaise,* J. Bédier, Paul Hazard. Editeur P. Martino, Larousse, Paris, 1948, TI p. 76.
    Un chevalier orgueilleux et impie se confesse un Vendredi Saint et par défi refuse diverses pénitences. Finalement, pour toute pénitence, il doit remplir un baril au ruisseau. Ayant essayé divers stratagèmes en vain, il va, le coeur plein de rage, retrouver l'ermite; celui-ci lui indique que toute pénitence requiert amour et repentir. Voyant l'emotion altruiste de l'ermite, le chevalier verse une seule larme qui tombe dans le baril et le remplit. A sa mort, les anges emportent son âme purifiée.
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MYTH AND THE 'MAU MAU'*

by D.A. MAUGHAN BROWN

'Mau Mau'. The words conjure up nightmare images of mutilated bodies and bloodied pangas, of remote clearings in the forest lit by flickering fires, and peopled by shadowy forms engaging in obscene and bestial rituals. Perhaps even more deeply and directly disturbing for white South Africans, the words evoke images of isolated farms, lonely little groups of whites, surrounded in the darkness and being crept up on by black figures, filled with who knows what savage and evil desires. There are probably no two words which have greater power to arouse in white people every conceivable racially based fear, defined and undefined, acknowledged and unacknowledged. And it isn't just those who can remember reading the newspaper reports and listening to the radio in the early fifties in whom the words 'Mau Mau' are likely to produce this response. The view of Mau Mau broadcast then is still being disseminated now, as evidenced by the monotonous regularity with which the paperback editions of Robert Ruark's two novels about Mau Mau *Something of Value* and *Uhuru* are reprinted year after year.[1] Ruark depicts his Mau Mau stereotypes as having orgasms when they serve his mythologizing aims by hacking his white protagonists to pieces for him.[2] It is a daunting thought that he has probably played a greater part in shaping the image of Africa in the contemporary British and American mind than any other writer.

And yet, as early as 1956 vastly different views of Mau Mau were being published in little read, and still largely unknown, books. In that year Peter Evans, a visiting English lawyer, wrote a book called *Law and Disorder* shortly after being deported from Kenya for conducting private investigations into the cold-blooded shooting of Mau Mau suspects. Evans concludes in that book:

> I cannot believe that the British public would have permitted the hanging of over 900 Indian 'terrorists' during the Indian struggle, as it has permitted the hanging of that number of Africans. It has only permitted it because it has been the victim of one of the biggest campaigns of misrepresentation which has ever been successfully projected.[3]

*This article is based on a University lecture delivered at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, on Wednesday, August 29, 1979.

What I want to do in this paper is try to give some idea of the extent to which the image of Mau Mau which dominates the European mind is, as Peter Evans said, the product of a campaign of misrepresentation. The very name 'Mau Mau' is an instance of this. The word has no accepted literal meaning in Gikuyu or Swahili, there isn't even any generally accepted origin of the name, and, more important, the members of the movement never applied the name to themselves. It was the white man's name for the movement. 'Mau Mau' is in inverted commas in the title of this paper because any unqualified use of the name is implicitly an endorsement of a particular view of the movement — the view popularised by the Kenyan European. As Kaggia, Kubai, Murumbi and Oneko say in their joint preface to Barnett and Njama's *Mau Mau From Within:*

> The very name 'Mau Mau' is an illustration of how successful propaganda can damn an entire movement to which thousands sacrificed everything, including their lives, by attaching to it an appellation that conjures up all the clichés about the 'dark continent' which still crowd the European mind.[4]

If evidence of a 'campaign' is needed it will be found, to give just one example, in the printed aerogrammes published by the East African Women's League (which claims in its first newsletter to be a 'non-political' organization) and sent all over the world by its members to propound the settler view. Four of these were printed and distributed in February 1953 alone. These aerogramme newsletters are redolent with such generalizing stereotypes about the Gikuyu as 'this ambitious and quick-witted tribe' and this 'cunning and suspicious people'; they project such images of a colonial Nirvana as, 'If you arrive in Kenya by sea you will still see a peaceful land peopled by smiling Africans'; and they come up with such old time favourites as: 'The basic fact is not that the African has been held back by racial discrimination, but that he has travelled too far too quickly.'[5]

I will start by looking at the role myths play in justifying any given social and political dispensation and then try, as briefly as possible, to summarize some of the findings of recent historical research into the Mau Mau movement, before looking at some of the myths built up around Mau Mau. My purpose in doing this is simply, as far as possible, to de-mythologize the white image of Mau Mau by looking at the movement in an historical, and more particularly in a social and economic, perspective. In the process I hope to indicate that the ugliness and brutality of some of the actions of the forest fighters had historical causes and has to some extent been exaggerated in the public imagination, and to point

out that it was met by, indeed it was arguably caused by, an equal if not greater brutality on the part of the government forces.

In our present situation of escalating racial violence in South Africa it seems imperative that any archetypal images of black racial savagery, based on the misrepresentation of Mau Mau, which may be lurking in the recesses of the white South African psyche, be confronted and seen for the myths that they very often are. The relevance of a discussion of Mau Mau to South Africa today is inescapable. Firstly because the causes of Mau Mau were socio-economic, not psychological, as the myths maintained, and they were almost identical with the causes of racial violence in South Africa. Secondly, because the body of race myths on which the campaign of misrepresentation relied for its foundation was in every important aspect identical with the body of race myths which shore up white ideologies in South Africa today.

First I must define what is meant by 'myth'. The word is used here in its modern sociological sense of an image or set of images whose function is to explain existing social relations. The ideology of any given social group will always be found to be buttressed by a body of myths. By 'ideology' I mean the corporate view any group has been taught to have of its position in society; the system of belief whereby it justifies its acceptance or rejection of the existing political, social and economic order. The essential function that the myths perform lies in providing a distorted view of that part of the social reality likely to contradict the major presuppositions of the ideology.

The meaning ascribed to myth here is not, in fact, very far from its traditional meaning. The *Oxford Classical Dictionary* defines myth as:

> A pre-scientific and imaginative attempt to explain some phenomenon real or supposed, which excites the curiosity of the myth-maker, or perhaps more accurately, as an effort to reach a feeling of satisfaction in place of uneasy bewilderment concerning such phenomena.[6]

The crucial points in both definitions are that, firstly, myths are characteristically aetiological, and, secondly, that myths are 'pre-scientific and imaginative'. The main function of the dominant ideology in any social formation is to paper over its manifest contradictions in the interests of its ruling class. Ideology thus attempts, in the terms of the above quotation, to allow its adherents, 'to reach a feeling of satisfaction in place of uneasy bewilderment'. It is the interdependence of myth and ideology which enables myth to be defined in the *Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* as 'a whole value bestowing area of belief'[7]; and

which leads Monica Wilson to conclude that: 'Myths . . . provide a moral basis for a social system. They imply, if they do not state specifically, that a given system is right and just.'[8]

I

Let me illustrate all this by looking at the myth of Gikuyu agricultural incompetence. This is a useful point to start from; firstly, because it demonstrates how specific local myths can be grafted onto an already existing body of myths — the myths about Mau Mau were merely extensions of already existing colonial race myths; secondly, because myths about African agricultural incompetence were not confined to Kenya in the fifties, as many white South Africans are very happy to demonstrate; and, thirdly, because it introduces the land dispute which was the fundamental cause of the revolt.

By 1952 the myth had it that the Gikuyu was a hopelessly bad and short sighted farmer who exhausted his land before just moving on to the next piece, and that the only thing he could be guaranteed to produce was soil erosion. The white man, by contrast, was God's gift to the Kenyan soil. A random sample from publications about Kenya written by whites shows that Elspeth Huxley talks about 'the land destructive system of the African peasantry'[9]; the Kenya Electors' Union talks about 'primitive methods of African soil cultivation' which lead to 'soil erosion and very low productivity'[10]; Christopher Wilson says, 'the trouble among Kikuyu about land is due to their wasteful method of cultivation'[11]; and C.T. Stoneham has it that, 'in the native's view land is like firewood: you use it and then it is finished.'[12] Which leads him to conclude that, 'As farmers Africans are beneath contempt'.[13] The Europeans, by implication, are not.

This was a myth. Or rather, it was two myths. The soil erosion in the reserves was not the natural outcome of Gikuyu farming methods, and the whites were not God's gift to the Kenyan soil. As the publication in 1953 by Mr L.G. Troup of a government report titled *Report Inquiry into the General Economy of Farming in the Highlands*[14] makes very clear. The report concluded that, in D.H. Rawcliffe's summary of its findings:

> The general level of European farming is low and very often destructive. The condition of some of the farms can only be described as shocking. . . . In very many cases the white pioneer . . . grew cereal crops year after year on parts of his land as long as this system of 'farming' showed a profit. When the soil had been virtually exhausted that land was abandoned and further areas treated in the same destructive but profitable manner. Soil erosion inevitably resulted.[15]

A government report so damaging to the colonial myth had of necessity to have a discreet veil of silence drawn over it by the Colonial Office. After an initial statement in the Colonial Office Report for 1952 that the Troup report was awaited,[16] there is no further mention of it in any subsequent annual report.

The other side of the coin, Gikuyu agricultural ability can be seen, for example, in the District Commissioner for Naivasha's 1917 *Annual Report,* quoted by Frank Furedi: 'Agriculture has made little progress except at the hands of native squatters'.[17] Furedi's research into the squatters in the White Highlands leads him to conclude: 'During the first twenty years of this century not only were Kikuyu squatters able to maintain their position as independent producers but they also competed successfully with European settlers'.[18] And Robert Tignor, in *The Colonial Transformation of Kenya*, attributes the soil exhaustion in the reserves to population growth, agricultural expansion and the deleterious effects of some of the new crops being sown. Particularly wattle which, ironically, the colonial government encouraged the Gikuyu to grow under the mistaken impression that it was a soil restorer. He concludes that 'Everywhere the fallow periods were reduced. Whereas farmers had once allowed the land to lie uncultivated from eight to ten years, the fallow period had become only two years.'[19] Which was, as we have seen, two years longer than many of the white farmers allowed. So much for the Africans being beneath the settlers' contempt as farmers.

Now, as Margery Perham points out in *Race and Politics in Kenya:* 'The first pioneers who went into Uganda through Kenya were . . . astonished at the excellence and extent of Kikuyu cultivation.'[20] The myth must clearly have been, originally, a deliberate distortion. A glance at the land question makes its function obvious.

In 1952 the Gikuyu based their revolt on the allegation that the settlers had stolen their land. The settlers countered by arguing that the land they had taken was empty (Monica Wilson says, in another context, that 'the assertion that they colonized an empty land . . . is the typical "settlers' myth" ')[21] and that it had belonged to the Masai anyway. What is indisputable is that the Carter land commission in 1931 awarded the Gikuyu 109½ square miles, in compensation for land alienated from them.[22] By 1934, Barnett says, and his figures agree almost exactly with Brett's,[23] 'some 6 543 360 acres of land had been alienated for occupation by 2 027 settlers: an average of 2 534 acres per occupant, of which only 274 acres were actually under cultivation.'[24] The settler leader Michael Blundell admits in his autobiography that in 1952, by which time there were still only around 3 000 landholders in the White Highlands, 'there were large acreages in Euro-

pean ownership which were almost untouched.'[25] By 1952, Barnett says, 'Less than 0,7 percent of the entire population, a figure which includes all Europeans, held what has been estimated to be a minimum of twenty percent of the colony's best land.'[26]

Land for the Gikuyu, and the Gikuyu obviously are not alone in this, is not just a larger or smaller patch of soil on which to grow food. It is sanctified by association with the ancestral spirits, and J.M. Kariuki would appear not to be overstating the case when he says of the Gikuyu: 'They felt deep grievances over the land which had been taken from them, land without which they could have no religion or social security.'[27]

In spite of that, the question of who had originally held the land had become somewhat academic in the face of the immense bitterness which had grown up over the vast expanses of unused land on their doorstep which the Gikuyu in the overcrowded reserves were prohibited from expanding into. The economic rationale behind this situation was perfectly conveyed by Lord Delamere, who himself owned 142 000 acres of the White Highlands, and whose own Laikipia estate provided, in 1936, a perfect example of undeveloped land,[28] in his recommendation to the 1912 Labour Commission. If the Africans were to be successfully forced onto the labour market, he said, 'their reserves should be cut in order to prevent the Africans from having sufficient land to make them self supporting. If the Africans had enough land, and therefore stock and produce for sale, they would not be obliged to go out and labour for others.'[29]

This argument was, however, hardly in keeping with the trusteeship role the colonial government saw itself exercising over the infant nation, guarding and guiding it on its road to self-sufficiency, so some kind of rationalizing and justifying myth was needed. The myth of Gikuyu agricultural incompetence fitted the bill. It justified the settler, in his eyes, in having the land he used because, being white, he made such splendid use of it; and it justified him in possessing the land he couldn't use because by doing so he was preventing the destruction of the land by the Gikuyu — he was, of course, also thereby forcing the Gikuyu to work on his, the settler's farm, and presumably thereby graciously giving him the opportunity to learn about sound agricultural practice.

Any myth that denigrates the colonized tends to find ready acceptance in the colonial situation. As Albert Memmi puts it in *The Colonizer and the Colonized:*

> How can usurpation try to pass for legitimacy? One attempt can be made by demonstrating the usurper's eminent merits, so eminent that they deserve such compensation. Another is to harp on the usurped's demerits, so deep that they cannot

> help leading to misfortune. His disquiet and resulting thirst for justification require the usurper to extoll himself to the skies and to drive the usurped below the ground at the same time.[30]

The myth of Gikuyu agricultural incompetence flourished all the better in the colonial climate for being grafted onto what is generally referred to as the 'Myth of the lazy native'. This would appear to be a universal colonial myth deriving from an unholy alliance between the protestant work ethic and the dependence of colonial profitability on the exploitation of labour. It was one of the cornerstones of the ideology of the slave owners in the southern states, as Genovese makes clear;[31] it was current among the eighteenth century Dutch in Java, as shown by Syed Alatas.[32] But the myth of the lazy native can, in fact, be shown to be merely an extension into racial terminology, as is the case with many of the myths, of the class myths of Western Europe — as evidence contemporary myths about the British working class's compulsive exploitation of social security and the British worker's desire to spend his life on the dole.

The ease with which the grafting was accomplished is demonstrated by a sentence taken from Ione Leigh's *In the Shadow of the Mau Mau:* 'The African is averse to labour, and the land he possesses quickly degenerates into eroded soil, into fields untilled and undeveloped.'[33] The kind of contradiction which the myth leads to, but which the overall ideology prevents from being noticed, is seen most clearly in two passages from a book called *My Kenya Acres* by Cherry Lander. Mrs Lander tells us that:

> The Kikuyu custom of land tenure and wasteful methods of agriculture required him to have many acres to make a living. . . . After a hard struggle the Dept of Agriculture is teaching these reluctant people how to preserve their land. With proper terracing, draining and crop rotation no more land is being destroyed. . . . The African finds it hard to believe that one piece of land can be farmed with careful husbandry for hundreds of years, and it is an uphill struggle to teach him that which he is so sure is impossible.[34]

And this is from someone who had bought a 500 acre farm on impulse and frankly admits: 'I didn't know anything about farming. My only qualification was three weeks at Egerton College, some hours of listening to farm talk, and a new-found determination.'[35] What price the countless generations of Gikuyu agricultural experience in the face of three weeks at Egerton College and some hours of farm talk?

Myths can, it would seem, be consciously created, and such creation would clearly be one of the chief activities of anyone engaging in a 'campaign of misrepresentation.' It is my contention in this paper that the European image of Mau Mau is made up almost entirely of such myths, and that these myths were in many instances deliberately created to disguise the true causes of the revolt, to distort the nature of those who took part, and to justify the repressive measures taken to quell it.

II

In establishing where the myths about Mau Mau begin and the ascertainable facts end it is obviously necessary to turn to historical and purportedly historical accounts. Considering the size of the white population the revolt threw up a remarkable number of accounts written by white Kenyans — almost without exception propagandizing the settler view. Shortly after the Emergency a number of supposedly objective historical accounts were written. The most notable of these being the Corfield Report and Fred Majdalaney's *State of Emergency: The Full Story of Mau Mau.*[36] The Corfield Report, *The Origins and Growth of Mau Mau*, Command Paper No 1030, was the official Government history of the revolt.[37] Some measure of its objectivity can be seen from the fact that, while Corfield starts with a disclaimer to any intention of arriving at conclusions, he says on page 2, 'It is the historian's privilege to interpret and not merely relate the events, and to state what appear to him the lessons to be learnt. . . . I am however denied this privilege', we nevertheless find him three pages later arriving at the conclusion that: 'Mau Mau was a violent and wholly evil manifestation of nationalism.' And he is prone to such non-evaluative comments as: 'Fred Kubai was . . . the recognized leader of the Kikuyu thugs in Nairobi'[38] and, 'Truth is a somewhat rare virtue in the African whose main objective is so often to outwit the course of justice.'[39] Majdalaney's *State of Emergency: The Full Story of Mau Mau* is probably the best known non-fictional, or supposedly non-fictional, account of the movement. But Majdalaney somehow managed to obtain his 'Full Story of Mau Mau' without consulting a single member of the movement. His sources were without exception anti-Mau Mau.

Since Independence at least nine autobiographies of members of the movement have been published, starting with J.M. Kariuki's *Mau Mau Detainee.* No autobiographies of Kenyans who fought on the government side have been published to date. Less partisan accounts of the movement have been hindered by the destruction of many colonial records immediately prior to Independence, and by the exceedingly equivocal attitude towards

Mau Mau on the part of the Kenyan Government. Two doctoral theses have been written on the revolt. The one, Robert Buijtenhuijs's *Le Mouvement Mau Mau,*[40] the most comprehensive account of the movement written to date, has yet to be translated from the French; the other Donald Barnett's *The Structural Integration and Disintegration of the Aberdare Guerrilla Forces* has not been published and is only available on microfilm. There are however two authoritative works which are readily available. These are Rosberg and Nottingham's *The Myth of Mau Mau*[41] and Barnett and Njama's *Mau Mau From Within.* The following sketch of Mau Mau relies heavily on Barnett and Buijtenhuijs in particular.

It is not my intention in this paper to become involved in the intricacies of the on-going debate on the categorization of Mau Mau as either a peasants' revolt or a manifestation of militant African nationalism,[42] my concern is with a discussion of the popular mythology about Mau Mau, which rejected the notion of African nationalism, (e.g. Ione Leigh: 'There has been an attempt to disguise Mau Mau as a liberation movement against oppressive colonial rule. It is no liberation movement.'[43]) and would appear not to have been introduced to the concept of a peasants' revolt. While the exact nature of the group of fighters in the forests from 1952–56 is debatable, it is quite clear that the lineage of their political demands can be traced back to the first important urban African political organization established in colonial Kenya, the East African Association founded in 1919, and its rural counterpart the Kikuyu Association, established in either 1918 or 1919.

The East African Association was closed down in 1922 and its place was taken by the Kikuyu Central Association in mid-1924. The K.C.A. had three main concerns: constitutional reform which would allow Africans a share in the political direction of Kenya; the return of land alienated for white settlement; and the assertion of the worthiness of Gikuyu tribal custom. This last was seen, in particular, in the Association's defence of female circumcision in the face of the Church of Scotland missionaries' attack on that custom in 1929. The K.C.A. continued to agitate unsuccessfully for reforms to the discriminatory colonial dispensation throughout the 1930s, was banned in 1940, allegedly on the grounds that it had been in communication with the King's enemies in Ethopia, but continued as an underground organization throughout World War II in spite of the detention of its leaders. In 1944 a new, country-wide, African political organization was founded, the Kenya African Union, which gained the support of many members of the banned K.C.A. when Jomo Kenyatta assumed its presidency in 1947. K.A.U. continued the African na-

tionalist demands for constitutional reforms where K.C.A. was forced to leave off when it was banned, and K.A.U. was, in its turn, proscribed in June 1953, after the declaration of the Emergency. Barnett and Njama's account of the ideology of the forest fighters in *Mau Mau From Within* makes it clear that their main objectives were the return of the 'stolen' lands and the attainment of self-government for the African majority in Kenya. As these were also the two main objectives of the African nationalist movement whose evolution I have just sketched, it seems clear that in one respect Mau Mau was a direct development of Kenya African Nationalism. It was a militant response to years of frustration at the refusal of the colonial government to listen to demands for constitutional reform. As Oginga Odinga put it: 'Kenya nationalism turned violent because for thirty years it was treated as seditious and denied all legitimate outlet.'[44]

But the matter is not as simple as that would suggest. For a start, it is a vexed question as to precisely what 'Mau Mau' was prior to the declaration of the State of Emergency, and it is difficult to assess its structural relationship to K.C.A. and K.A.U. What is quite clear is that at the time of the declaration of Emergency on October 20th, 1952 there was no centrally co-ordinated movement capable of organizing a successful revolt against the colonial government. There was, certainly, the Mau Mau Central Committee in Nairobi, which was established by the Nairobi executive of the K.A.U. after the take-over of that branch by militant trade unionists, notably Bildad Kaggia and Fred Kubai, in June 1951. But there was also the largely independent squatter movement in the White Highlands described by Frank Furedi, which was largely responsible for such acts of violence, more than a little premature as far as the urban leadership was concerned, as were used by the government to justify the declaration of the Emergency. As John Spencer puts it: 'There simply was no central body that controlled all the oathing, all the collection of arms and ammunition, the arson, the raids on European farms, and the sundry acts of violence that were to increase during K.A.U.'s last years.'[45]

Up to October 1952 Mau Mau is best described in Tamarkin's words as those 'groups and leaders who had advocated the employment of organized violence in pursuit of their political, anti-colonial cause, and who had started to organize themselves to that end prior to the declaration of the State of Emergency in October 1952.'[46]

III

The State of Emergency was purportedly declared, very much too late in the settler's eyes, in the face of an immediate threat to

the safety of the state. Figures are available which show quite conclusively that in 1952 there were in fact fewer murders and serious woundings in Kenya than in previous years, and that while there was a steady increase in the number of cases coming before the Kenya courts from 1948 to 1951 in 1952 the number actually declined.[47] Buijtenhuijs's research leads him to agree with Peter Evans:

> The measures taken by Sir Evelyn Baring on 20th October, 1952 are better explained in the light of the settlers' provocative campaign against the African political leaders than as a product of any real threat offered by the Mau Mau movement . . . Sir Philip Mitchell (the previous governor) was right . . . there was no organized revolutionary movement in Kikuyuland ready to unleash a widespread revolt.[48]

Sir Evelyn Baring, who had been appointed ten days before the declaration, had clearly been taken in by the settlers who were attempting to entrench their monopoly of political power by decapitating the growing African political movements. This would have been perfectly consistent with a history of settler attempts to achieve independent white government, whose most picturesque episode was the formulation in 1923 of detailed plans for a *coup d'état* in response to proposals to allow unrestricted Indian immigration and a qualified franchise which would have resulted in a 10 % Indian electorate. The existence of the plan was discreetly leaked and the proposals were never implemented. It is a paradox typical of the contradictions in colonial ideology that the British National Anthem was always sung after meetings held to discuss the *coup*.

With the declaration of the State of Emergency almost 200 African leaders were arrested and detained and a revolt was precipitated. Rosberg and Nottingham, Buijtenhuijs and Barnett are all agreed that the declaration was the cause of, rather than a response to, the revolt.

One immediate result of the declaration was the eviction of tens of thousands of Gikuyu squatters from the White Highlands. On returning to the already overcrowded reserves they were left with the choice of either joining the forest fighters or starving. Another result was that, as Barnett puts it, and there is ample evidence to back his assertions:

> A significant sector of the European settler community tended to interpret the emergency declaration and legislation as promulgating a sort of 'open season' on Kikuyu, Embu and Meru tribesmen. Forced confessions, beatings, robbery

> of stock, food and clothing, brutalities of various sorts and outright killings were frequent enough occurrences to arouse a fear in the hearts of most Kikuyu that the intent of the Government was to eliminate the whole tribe.[49]

The Mau Mau autobiographies lend support to the assertion that fear of genocide was one of the main causes of the drift into the forest.

With the arrest of the African nationalist leadership the character of the movement was perforce changed. From being conceived of as a nationalist liberation movement it became, in effect, a peasant's revolt. As Buijtenhuijs put it: 'Far from being confronted with an elite in search of a revolution' (as all the myths about agitators would have had people believe) 'we find ourselves confronted with a revolution in search of an elite.'[50] The 25 to 30 thousand forest fighters did, in fact, have very little support from educated Gikuyu.[51]

It took government forces numbering over 50 000 men four years from October 1952 to the arrest of Dedan Kimathi in October 1956 to suppress the revolt. And if the peasants didn't regain their land they undoubtedly hastened a nominal Independence.

The forest fighters received no foreign help whatsoever — for all that their major military success, the capture of the Navaisha police station, with its attendant seizure of a large quantity of arms, and the release of all the prisoners, was so well planned and executed that it led to the creation of a myth of foreign organization. The settlers grafted a myth of Russian and Indian advisers, enthusiastically endorsed by Ruark,[52] onto the widespread colonial myth that the African was too stupid to be able to organize anything himself. But in spite of the lack of material support from outside Kenya and in spite of the forest fighters' lack of equipment and training, the eventual government success was not attributable to military superiority. It was due, rather, to the cutting off of the forest fighters from their sources of supply in the reserves, which was effected by the confinement of up to 90 000 Gikuyu in detention camps, and by enforced 'villageization', with the confiscation of livestock, and forced labour on the digging of trenches right round the Aberdares and Mount Kenya, thrown in for good measure. Villageization, a tactic developed in Malaya and enthusiastically emulated by the Portuguese and in Rhodesia, enabled punitive curfews to be imposed, often for 23 hours a day, and inevitably resulted in widespread famine and death in the reserves.

The settlers based their response to Mau Mau on the assumption that, as expressed by the settler leader Michael Blundell,

now Sir Michael Blundell: 'The problem would not be cured until we've made it much more painful and distasteful to be a member of Mau Mau than it is to support the government.'[53] The pain and distastefulness were in fact extended, through the 'screening' process whereby those who had taken the Mau Mau oath were supposedly distinguished from those who were merely suspected of having taken it, to the whole Gikuyu tribe. It was Blundell again, who described the process of screening as 'nothing more than intensive and sustained interrogation using every possible known trick of the interrogator.'[54] Sir William Worley, Vice-President of the Court of Appeal for East Africa handed down a judgement in that court which condemned the attitude implicit in Blundell's 'nothing more than . . .'. He described screening teams as using 'unlawful and criminal violence' which is 'the negation of the rule of law.'[55]

The 'tricks of interrogators', in Blundell's term, which became known to the courts of Kenya included the slicing off of ears and the boring of holes in eardrums, the pouring of paraffin over suspects who were then set alight, the flogging of suspects until they died and the burning of eardrums with lighted cigarettes. So rife were instances of brutality that a British Parliamentary delegation to Kenya in 1954 felt constrained to report: 'Brutality and malpractices by the police have occurred on a scale which constitutes a threat to public confidence in the forces of law and order.'[56] While 'brutality and malpractices' were illegal, the offering by the British Army of £5 rewards to the first sub-unit killing an insurgent was not.[57] And the due processes of the law were themselves accelerated to the point where, though legal, they were somewhat less than discriminating. In July 1953 the Attorney General said: 'In the past two months no less than 10 000 Mau Mau cases have been brought before the courts — an average of one disposed of every two minutes.'[58] The sentences 'disposed of' entailed, as often as not, seven years imprisonment. In the first two years of the Emergency 290 people were hanged for possessing arms or ammunition, often on the strength of one bullet of dubious origin, and 45 were hanged for administering oaths.[59]

The causes of the revolt were economic and social. Anthony Clayton concludes that 'Mau Mau was a peasants' revolt against an unequal economic structure supported by discriminatory laws and institutions.'[60] Just how unequal can be seen from two examples. In 1953 the annual *per capita* income of whites in Kenya was 25 times that of Africans: £660:£27. And it was stated in the House of Commons in 1954 that the average amount spent on a white child's education in Kenya in 1952 was £49.6.0 as against £0.3.0 for black children.[61] In other words the amount spent on whites was 329 times that spent on blacks. Moreover it has been

established that while the real value of African income grew at an average 1 % per year between 1922–1952 the population growth was about 3 % — so African living standards were steadily deteriorating under colonialism.[62]

But the settlers' justificatory ideology could not allow any admission of legitimate social and economic grievances, so a set of myths had to be elaborated to account for the revolt. If the causes of the revolt could not be social or economic they must be psychological, so a psychologist was drafted in to provide a government report on 'The Psychology of Mau Mau.'[63] His post was that of chief myth-maker; in effect, if not in intention. His name, appropriately enough, was Dr J.C. Carothers. The report was published in 1954 and some measure of the need experienced by the white population of Kenya, quoting the earlier definition, 'to reach a feeling of satisfaction in place of uneasy bewilderment' can be seen from the fact that the report ran to at least seven impressions before it had even been considered by the government.

Carothers concluded that Mau Mau 'arose from the development of an anxious conflictual situation in people who, from contact with the alien culture, had lost the supportive and restraining influences of their own culture, yet had not lost their 'magic' mode of thinking. It arose from the exploitation of this situation by relatively sophisticated egotists.'[64] The first part of this would, of course, apply equally well to all the colonial African tribes which did not produce Mau Mau, and the second part is inoperative without the first. But from then on Mau Mau was conclusively proven to be the result of the Gikuyu tribe's failure to come to terms with western civilization, and its consequent regression into a primitive past. Carothers' report lent an aura of academic and scientific respectability to the myth-making and had a wholly disproportionate influence on the European image of Mau Mau. And this in spite of a penchant for such dubiously scientific statements as 'In comparison with the Kikuyu the Kamba have more music in their souls'[65] and (in comparison with the African child) 'the European child becomes familiar from an early age with spatio-temporal relations and mechanical causation and realizes that the material world works on general laws and that God helps those who help themselves.'[65]

One of the main functions of Carothers's report was to provide a supposedly scientific foundation for the significantly named 'rehabilitation' programme to which Mau Mau detainees were subjected. It lent credibility to an official view of the revolt which, in Buijtenhuijs's words: 'systematically considered the particpants in the revolution as mentally ill, as sinners or as juvenile delinquents, and never as adult human beings fighting for a legitimate cause.'[67]

What was, in fact, a revolt against social and economic oppression was deliberately mythologised as a return to the past, or 'a collapse of the African mind' as Blundell put it.[68] Key words in the mythology were 'primitivism', 'atavism', 'regression', 'darkness', 'savagery', and so on. The way was opened for the emotive vocabulary of nightmare and operating theatre of such accounts as Ione Leigh's: 'It is no liberation movement. It is an evil malignant growth, a dark, tribal, septic, focus, and it has to be destroyed.'[69] Perhaps the most colourful account of Mau Mau along these lines is that given by Sir Philip Mitchell, Governor of Kenya from 1944–52, who attributes the revolt to:

> The black and bloodthirsty forces of sorcery and magic, stirring in the vicious hearts and minds of wicked men and, as the church and the schools spread over the land, whispering to them 'Kill, Kill, Kill for your last chance in Africa is at hand . . .'. The light is spreading and these dark and dreadful distortions of the human spirit cannot bear it.[70]

So much for the myths about the causes of the revolt. Other myths will be dealt with even more briefly.

IV

The mythology has, I suspect, created an exaggerated notion in the European mind of the number of whites killed in the Emergency. There were in fact just 32 European civilian deaths. As Goodhart, who was anything but a Mau Mau supporter, as his terminology makes clear, pointed out: 'During the Emergency more Europeans were killed in traffic accidents within the city limits of Nairobi than were murdered by terrorists in the whole of Kenya.'[71]

The notion that tens of thousands of Gikuyu were killed by Mau Mau — as one finds for example in Ruark, 'And hundreds, then tens of hundreds of Kikuyu were slain coldly for refusing to accept the Mau Mau oaths'[72] — was a myth. The official figure was 1 819, which was just under one sixth of the 11 503 alleged members of Mau Mau killed by government forces.[73] Even by the official figure, seven times as many Mau Mau were killed as captured, which compares interestingly with the ratio of 2:1 under not dissimilar conditions in Malaya,[74] and lends support to Rawcliffe's contention that, 'it was the deliberate policy of the security forces to kill rather than wound or capture.'[75] Corfield's figure has however been hotly contested. For example Maina-wa-Kinyatti says: 'The contention by the British that 11 000 Africans died is grossly erroneous. A conservative estimate is that at least

150 000 Kenyans lost their lives, 250 000 were maimed for life and 400 000 were left homeless.'[76] While it was obviously in the colonial government's interests to minimize the number of deaths caused by the security forces it would not seem to have been in their interests to underestimate the number of blacks killed by Mau Mau.

It is a myth that Mau Mau generally killed with unnecessary bloodiness and savagery, as seen in Ione Leigh: 'The murders have been so savage, the mutilation of bodies so horrifying, the photographs of victims with gashed heads, hacked off limbs, flayed bodies, and exposed intestines so gruesome, that it is almost impossible to believe that human beings could be capable of such atrocities.'[77] Photographs, of course, cannot lie; nor can their government propaganda-line captions. Goodhart's statement is typical: 'Brother butchered brother with evident enjoyment.'[78] It must be remembered that killing with a panga is necessarily messier than killing with a bullet. But killing with a bullet is not necessarily any 'cleaner' for all that. Moreover a Dr Wilkinson who according to Buijtenhuijs belonged 100 % to the European school, and Wilkinson's terminology does not belie Buijtenhuijs, examined the bodies of some 210 people allegedly killed by Mau Mau. He concluded: 'The commonest method of killing with a panga was the infliction of about six blows over the head . . . this method was used so frequently that it suggested that the terrorists had been trained to kill in this way. The method certainly assured a quick and certain death for their victims.'[79]

It was a myth that a large proportion of the Mau Mau victims were women and children. Wilkinson noted in an analysis of 1 024 people supposed to have been killed by Mau Mau, well over half the total number, that fewer than 10 % were women. Among the 210 bodies mentioned earlier only three were those of children.

It is a myth that there was extensive mutilation of Mau Mau victims. Wilkinson's survey showed that only four of the 210 bodies had been mutilated. And it must be remembered on this score that the government forces were in the habit of cutting off the hands of those they killed and taking the hands back to the police station for finger printing.[80] Which was doubtless one of the factors which gave rise to the mutilation myth in the first place.

It is a myth that Mau Mau was exclusively Gikuyu and aimed at Gikuyu domination of the other tribes. The movement was predominantly Gikuyu because specifically Gikuyu symbols and forms were needed in oathing ceremonies designed to unite the tribe behind the movement. But Corfield admits that thousands of Kamba as well as a number of Luo and Maragoli had been oathed,[81] 10 % of the hard core detainees in the notorious Hola

camp in 1959 were Luo,[82] and contrary to one of the settlers' most cherished myths, Masai also took part.[83] Of the twin ideological goals of Land and Freedom, the 'Land' component related largely to specifically Gikuyu interests, but 'Freedom' was conceived of in nationalist terms.

It is a myth that Mau Mau was led or 'managed' by Kenyatta. A reading of the transcript of his trial makes it obvious that the findings of the court at Kapenguria were patently unjust.[84] One doesn't even need to know that the chief prosecution witness, Rawson Macharia, afterwards admitted that he had been bribed by the police to give fabricated evidence. Moreover recent accounts of the structural organization of Mau Mau make it clear that Kenyatta did not know what was happening. Spencer, for example, states: 'When *Muhimu* (the Mau Mau central committee) was formed, its leaders put Kenyatta's name into the oath and people swore that they would act on his behalf; yet except for the occasional reports of the work of the Committee, Kenyatta knew little about it.'[85] And Kaggia argues that Kenyatta deliberately chose to 'know very little about what went on at Mau Mau central committee meetings.'[86]

Analysis of Mau Mau oaths shows it is a myth that Mau Mau was specifically directed against Christianity — as argued in Ione Leigh's 'The aims of the society are to destroy Christianity and to murder or expell the Europeans.'[87] Mau Mau in fact incorporated Christian symbolism into the oathing ceremonies with no blasphemous intent, and one finds frequent recourse being made to Christianity throughout Njama's account of life in the forest. Buijtenhuijs points out that only one European missionary, and missionaries are obviously the most vulnerable sector of the community, was killed during the course of the revolt, and cites sources which suggest that it was deliberate Mau Mau policy to spare the lives of Catholic priests. He would seem to put his finger on the crux of the matter when he says: 'We get the impression that the majority of the Mau Mau fighters were very much less Anti-Christian than the Kikuyu Christians were anti-Mau Mau.'[88] This was not solely out of religious conviction. Being a Christian opened the way to certain limited social and economic opportunities and generally conferred a degree of privilege.

V

It remains only to comment on two of the main areas of myth-making: the Lari massacre and the Mau Mau oaths.

On the night of 6th March 1953 a group of homesteads on the Lari ridge was attacked by a large body of men. Men, women and children were killed with pangas and huts were burned with

all their occupants. An estimated 97 people died. Majdalaney provides the clue to Lari's importance when he says: 'Lari shocked and moved the world. Lari was the definitive horror by which every other act of Mau Mau would be measured.'[89] Lari 'shocked and moved the world' in part because it was deliberately made the centre-pin of the campaign of misrepresentation which made it 'the definitive horror.' That it was a horror there can be no doubt — just how much of the horror Mau Mau was responsible for is, however, open to very considerable doubt.

The Mau Mau autobiographies, predictably, claim that government forces were responsible for many of the deaths at Lari. The motive, as Njama puts it, being 'to disdain Mau Mau for the mercilessly unjust killing of women and children, thereby causing their sympathisers to think that Mau Mau had lost sight of their enemies.'[90] But even the *History of the Loyalists,* the official history of the Kikuyu Home Guard, approvingly announces that the casualties suffered by the attackers at Lari far outnumbered those of the loyalists and security forces combined.[91]

What is clear is that the government propaganda line was to suppress the evidence that Lari was, as the London *Sunday Times* reported that weekend, 'a local affair';[92] to claim to have intercepted, conveniently too late, a document sent out by the Mau Mau central council demanding that delegates from all districts be sent to take part in the raid; and, thereby, to place responsibility on the Mau Mau movement and the Gikuyu tribe as a whole. Thus making it the definitive horror. It is quite certain that allegations that the raid was led by General China, and/or Dedan Kimathi are untrue.

The glance at colonial history which the myth is clearly designed to discourage shows that the attack was in fact directed specifically against the Lari 'Chief', Luka Wakahangara. Luka had been moved to Lari from Tigoni in 1940 when an island of unalienated Crown land near Limuru, surrounded by resentful white farmers, had been 'exchanged' for a block of land at Lari. The Tigoni landholders originally refused to move as other Gikuyu families had claims to the land at Lari. Luka, however, relented, moved and, predictably, was made 'chief' at Lari. The others refused to move, were forcibly evicted, and Luka's two main opponents were detained for three years for their pains. Luka became a symbol of betrayal, threw in his lot with the government and assisted in the establishment of one of the first two Home Guard posts in Kiambu. Lari was, in fact, an attack by a group of landless peasants on a symbol of oppression who was also, not coincidentally, a land holder. The attack was the resolution of a long-standing vendetta over land, it almost certainly had nothing whatever to do with the Mau Mau leadership, and it only

concerned members of the movement in so far as they were the landless peasants involved. Support would seem to be lent to this interpretation by the D.C. in Kiambu's admission at the end of 1953, the first full year of the Emergency, that half the murders in the district during the past year had been due to land cases.[93] In this connection, it is important to note than an analysis of 900 Home Guard members carried out by J.D. Campbell, the D.C. at Githunguri, revealed that almost all the leaders and two thirds of the remainder were relatively wealthy by Gikuyu standards.[94] Those who fought for the government were, in general, those who had most to lose by the demise of colonial discrimination.

VI

This brings me finally to the Mau Mau oaths. No other single aspect of the movement has generated so much European myth-making or such extremes of emotive writing. Sir Philip Mitchell: The man who takes the oath swears to be the 'slave and the terror ridden servant of the powers of evil.'[95] Ione Leigh: 'The ritual has become more and more bestial in character. With its bloodlust and its revolting obscenities, Mau Mau is reaching across the country . . . .'[96] Expressions of horror at Mau Mau oaths appear to have become the rallying call and the mutual recognition signal among the settlers and their sympathisers.

Oathing had played an extremely important role in pre-colonial Gikuyu society and was, as Jomo Kenyatta put it in *Facing Mount Kenya,* 'the most important factor controlling the court procedures'.[97] For a person who believed implicitly in the power of the oath, having to utter the words 'If I tell a lie, let this symbol of truth kill me' was a guarantee of veracity. Kenyatta describes three important forms of oath 'which were so terribly feared, morally and religiously, that no one dared to take them unless he was perfectly sure . . . that he was innocent or that his claim was genuine.'[98] The first was *muma* (which seems, of all those put forward, the most likely derivation of the name 'Mau Mau'), an oath sworn on minor disputes. The symbol of this oath was a mixture of the blood and stomach contents of a lamb with various herbs which was placed in a wild banana leaf. But for the replacement of the lamb by a goat, this symbol was retained in the Mau Mau oath. The second was *koringa thenge* (to swear by killing a male goat). This was an oath sworn when a considerable amount of property was involved in the dispute, and involved breaking all the limbs of a live goat while swearing the oath. While this, much the most brutal, form of oath was eschewed by Mau Mau, it was, ironically, the form the colonial government, acting in the interests of 'civilization', approved for the so-called

'purifying' ceremony administered to those who had confessed to having taken the oath of unity. Thirdly, there was the *gethathi* oath, taken in cases of murder and theft, whose symbol was a small red stone with seven natural holes in it through which several grass stalks had to be passed. With the substitution of the more readily available *ngata*, a bone with seven holes from the neck of a goat, for the *gethathi* stone, this symbol was also retained in the Mau Mau oath of unity.

It is important to recognize the extent to which these traditional oathing symbols were incorporated in the Mau Mau oathing ceremony because, after Carothers,[99] it is necessary to insist that the oath had its origins in traditional Gikuyu custom and not, via Jomo Kenyatta, in mediaeval European withcraft and satanism.

Given this traditional background it was an obvious step for Gikuyu leaders to appropriate oathing to political ends in the colonial era when they needed a guarantee of Gikuyu loyalty to their political associations. The leaders of the Kikuyu Central Association introduced an oath of loyalty in 1926 but, as Rosberg and Nottingham point out,[100] it was an oath sworn on the Bible, it had few traditional elements and it appeared to be modelled on the oath of loyalty to the King which had to be sworn by members of the Local Native Councils. John Spencer provides the clearest account of the subsequent development of the oath.[101] The early K.C.A. oath was used through the 1930s until a resurgence of interest in the association, and its reconstitution in 1938, resulting from a decade of fruitless efforts at constitutional reform, saw a fundamental change in the oath, with the replacement of the Bible by the blood and meat of a goat as the central symbol. Towards the end of World War II the caretaker leaders of the now banned K.C.A., remembering Harry Thuku's about-face during detention, made the detained K.C.A. leaders swear this oath of loyalty on their release from detention, and the released leaders took over the organization of a renewed oathing campaign. The object at that stage was to gain enough support for the party to enable effective pressure to be put on the government to lift the 1940 ban. Towards the end of 1948 the K.C.A. leaders introduced new elements into the oath, drawn from the oath sworn by the Olenguruone settlers who, in 1943–44 had devised an oath of unity to guarantee their solidarity in their refusal to comply with agricultural regulations imposed on them by the government. It was the merging of the Olenguruone oath with the K.C.A. loyalty oath, as revised in 1938, which produced the Mau Mau oath of unity. As disillusionment with the K.C.A.'s and K.A.U.'s constitutional approach gathered momentum and the direction of African nationalism in Kenya became increas-

ingly militant, so the pattern of oathing changed from the oathing of select individuals known to be trustworthy, which had been K.C.A. policy, to mass oathings intended to gain the support of the whole Gikuyu tribe, the oathing of women being a significant departure from tradition.

Myth has it that there were as many as eleven different Mau Mau oaths. The forest fighters and the Mau Mau leadership appear to have recognized only two. The first oath, the oath of unity, which was sworn by all members of the movement, an estimated 90 % of all Gikuyu adults, and the second, so-called platoon, or Batuni, oath which was sworn by the forest fighters and committed the swearer to kill when necessary.

There is fairly general agreement among both colonial and Gikuyu writers as to the ritual and the vows involved in the first Mau Mau oath — even if there is not the same agreement as to the meaning or significance of the oath. The ritual generally involved removing all European-made articles from the body; wearing a bracelet or necklet of twisted grass or goatskin; passing under an arch made of banana stalks, maize stalks and sugarcane; taking seven sips from a hollowed-out banana stem containing a mixture of goat's blood, soil, the undigested contents of the goat's stomach, and crushed grain; pricking, first the eyes of the dead goat, and then seven sodom apples, seven times with kei-apple thorns; taking seven bites of the goat's thorax; and inserting a piece of reed into the seven holes of the goat's *ngata*. The ritual was usually concluded by the administrator's making the sign of the cross on the initiate's forehead with the mixture of blood and grain. The ritual was an elaborate, and carefully formulated, synthesis of elements from the traditional initiation ceremony, from traditional oathing rituals, and from Christianity. It was designed as an initiation rite which effectively elevated the society to the status of the tribe. There was not the faintest trace of witchcraft or satanism and the ritual was wholly unobjectionable — apart perhaps from the taste of the mixture of goat's blood, soil, crushed grain and the undigested contents of the goat's stomach which had to be sipped.

The ritual of the Batuni oath would appear to have been different in only one major respect. Kariuki's account is typical of the accounts given in the autobiographies. The oath administrator, he says, 'told me to take the thorax of the goat which had been skinned, to put my penis through a hole that had been made in it and to hold the rest of it in my left hand in front of me' while repeating the oaths.[102] Barnett explains the significance of this: 'The sexual acts or symbols performed or invoked while swearing an oath were calculated violations of acknowledged taboos designed, in both the traditional and modern usage, to revolt and inspire

awe and fear in the initiate or accused.'[103] The practice described here is clearly pretty innocuous. Equally clearly it would only have required predispositions such as Ione Leigh's: 'Sex and drinking figure largely in all native ceremonies, they are matters which they understand,'[104] for such practices to have assumed the proportions of the obscenity, perversion and bestiality alleged by the settlers.

Settler accounts of the so-called 'advanced' oaths, the other nine or so, were all based on confessions made under torture. One of the colonial myths had it that the African is a congenital liar, as Stoneham expressed it: 'The black man has a perverted dislike of truthfulness: he will lie even in his own despite.'[105] It was, however, apparently logical to disbelieve everything a Gikuyu said except when he was being tortured. Which is ironic as Carothers, the seer of Mau Mau mythology, pointed out in relation to witchcraft that: 'The conduct of these trials was wholly foreign to modern ideas of justice, and the "facts" of witchcraft are mainly known to us from confessions extracted under torture: confessions moreover in which the judges were not satisfied until an expected pattern of confession was produced.[106] Apparently neither he nor his disciples made the obvious connection.

Many of the settler accounts are patently absurd. Take just one example, from a widely distributed pamphlet called 'Mau Mau Oath Ceremonies' which would seem to have been the definitive settler version. This alleges that the oath taken by a Mau Mau brigadier, not even a general, a brigadier, involved eating the brain of a European.[107] While there were a very considerable number of Mau Mau brigadiers only one European victim had his head removed. Which raises the question of what happened to that. Barnett concludes that there may, especially towards the end of the years in the forest, have been some oathing rituals which departed very significantly from those originally sanctioned by the Mau Mau leadership, but concludes that these 'were the exceptions, and the results of individual deviancy and proclivities among the more opportunist and/or magico-religious elements on the fringe of the organized movement. Government made much of these exceptional cases — trying to convey the notion that these were normal oathing practice and, hence, condemn the movement.'[108]

The positive side of the oathing had of necessity to be wholly overlooked in the myth-making. Amilcar Cabral, in an essay titled 'National Liberation and Culture' says: 'The study of the history of national liberation struggles shows that generally these struggles are preceded by an increase in expressions of culture, consolidated progressively into a successful or unsuccessful attempt to affirm the cultural personality of the dominated people,

as a means of negating the oppressor culture.'[109] This tendency is clearly visible in the development of the oath outlined above. Oaths such as 'I will never leave a member in difficulty without trying to help him'[110] had the effect of reviving the traditional pattern of village life, centering on communal help, which had fallen largely into abeyance under the impact of colonialism. Moreover the oaths reestablished a rigid code of moral behaviour. Members swore, among other things, 'Never to cause a girl to become pregnant and leave her unmarried', 'never to marry and seek a divorce', never to drink European beer or smoke cigarettes.[111] Sleeping with prostitutes was forbidden and rape was a capital offence. It is perhaps a measure of the extent to which this code was adhered to that there is not one allegation of the rape of a white woman in all the settler accounts of Mau Mau, not even, astonishingly, in Ruark. Which, as Fanon and Mannoni make clear, is, in terms of patterns of psycho-sexual myth-making in situations of racial conflict, an exceptional state of affairs.[112] Buijtenhuijs concludes that 'the first Mau Mau oath was in many respects a very positive phenomenon, and by no means the monstrous and nauseating perversion Sir Philip Mitchell would have us believe. It stands as a witness to the great vitality and the spirit of initiation of which the Gikuyu people gave evidence throughout the colonial period.'[113]

Finally, then, it seems legitimate to conclude that, given an awareness of the function that myths perform in legitimizing social structures, and given a preparedness to examine the historical foundations on which myths are constructed, posterity will never be convinced by any amount of myth-making that the causes of African revolution are to be found in the racial psychology of those who revolt. As the myth had it in Ione Leigh's inimitable rendering: 'Today they are fighting not for self government . . . but because it is in their nature to fight. The fact that they are committing the most savage and brutal murders is simply because brutality is part of the native character. It is prevalent in all Africans.'[114] That kind of myth-making might for a time bring comfort, that sense of satisfaction in place of uneasy bewilderment, to a few floundering die-hards clutching desperately for some flotsam from the nineteenth century to save them from a non-racial Africa. History will show, rather, that the causes of African revolution lie elsewhere. In the words of Mohamed Mathu, one of the fighters for Kenya's freedom from colonization, a rank and file member of Mau Mau:

> By paying the African slave wages for his labour, denying him access to secondary and higher education, removing him from the best land . . . and treating him with less respect

> than a dog, the white man . . . has created over the years a resentment and hatred amongst Africans which had to explode into violence.[115]

A hatred which, if the lessons of Kenya and Zimbabwe are ignored, has to explode into violence.

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NOTES

1. Both novels, published as Corgi books by Transworld Publishers, London, were reprinted every year from 1970–77 with one exception; 1973 in the case of *Something of Value,* 1975 in the case of *Uhuru.*
2. Robert Ruark, *Something of Value,* (Hamish Hamilton, London, 1955), p. 386.
3. Peter Evans, *Law and Disorder,* (Secker and Warburg, London, 1956), p. 286.
4. D.L. Barnett and Karari Njama, *Mau Mau From Within,* (Modern Reader Paperbacks, New York, 1966), p. 9.
5. East Africa Women's League Newsletters No. 1–5, issued from Box 308 (Box 306 — probably a misprint — in the case of No 3), Nairobi, January to March 1953. Quotations from Nos 2, 5, 1, 2 in that order.
6. *Oxford Classical Dictionary,* 1964, p. 594.
7. *Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought,* ed. A. Bullock and O. Stallybrass, (Fontana, London, 1977), p. 407.
8. Monica Wilson, 'Myths of Precedence', *Myth in Modern Africa* — The Fourteenth Conference Proceedings of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute for Social Research, ed. Allie Dubb, (Lusaka, 1960), p. 1.
9. Elspeth Huxley, *White Man's Country,* Vol. I, (Chatto and Windus, London, 1953), Preface p.v.
10. Pamphlet titled *The Kenya Land Question,* issued by The Electors' Union Nairobi, March 1953, p. 2.
11. Christopher Wilson, *Kenya's Warning,* (The English Press Ltd., Nairobi, undated), p. 71.
12. C.T. Stoneham, *Mau Mau,* (Museum Press, London, 1953), p. 121.
13. C.T. Stoneham, *Out of Barbarism,* (Museum Press, London, 1955), p. 177.
14. L.G. Troup, *Inquiry into the General Economy of Farming in the Highlands,* Government Printer, Nairobi, 1953.
15. D.H. Rawcliffe, *The Struggle for Kenya,* (Victor Gollancz, London, 1954), p. 165. Examination of the Troup Report vindicates the accuracy of this summary.
16. *Colonial Office Report on the Colony and Protectorate of Kenya for the Year 1952,* Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1953), p. 41.
17. Frank Furedi, 'The Social Composition of the Mau Mau Movement in the White Highlands', *The Journal of Peasant Studies,* (Vol. I, No 4, July 1974), p. 490.
18. Ibid.
19. Robert L. Tignor, *The Colonial Transformation of Kenya,* (Princeton U.P., 1976), p. 305
20. E. Huxley and M. Perham, *Race and Politics in Kenya,* (Faber, London, 1956), p. 86.

21. Monica Wilson, Op. Cit., p.3.
22. Kenya Land Commission Report, Command Paper 4580, May 1934. See also Sir Philip Mitchell, *African Afterthoughts*, (Hutchinson, London, 1954), p. 238.
23. E.A. Brett, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in East Africa*, (Heinemann, London, 1973), pp. 172–5.
24. Barnett and Njama, p. 32.
25. M. Blundell, *So Rough A Wind,* (Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1964), p. 88.
26. D.L. Barnett, *Mau Mau: The Structural Integration and Disintegration of Aberdare Guerrilla Forces*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, U.C.L.A., 1963, p. 37.
27. J.M. Kariuki, *Mau Mau Detainee,* (O.U.P., Nairobi, 1975), p. 21.
28. Paul van Zwanenberg, 'Kenya's Primitive Colonial Capitalism — The Economic Weakness of Kenya's Settlers up to 1940', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, (IX, 2, 1975), p. 291.
29. Native Labour Commission Report, 1913, pp. 108 ff. Referred to by M. Perham, *Race and Politics in Kenya*, p. 85, but suppressed by Elspeth Huxley in her biography of Delamere, *White Man's Country*.
30. Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, (Beacon Press, Boston, 1967), p. 52.
31. E.D. Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made*, (Allen Lane, London, 1970), e.g., p. 162.
32. S.H. Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, (Frank Cass, London, 1977), p. 61.
33. Ione Leigh, *In the Shadow of the Mau Mau*, W.H. Allen, London, 1954), p. 210.
34. Cherry Lander, *My Kenya Acres*, (Harrap, London, 1957), p. 94.
35. Ibid., p. 63.
36. Fred Majdalaney, *State of Emergency*, (Longmans, London, 1962).
37. F.D. Corfield, *The Origins and Growth of Mau Mau, an Historical Survey,* (H.M.S.O., London, 1960), Command Paper No 1030.
38. Ibid., p. 59.
39. Ibid., p. 253.
40. Robert Buijtenhuijs, *Le Mouvement Mau Mau*, (Mouton, The Hague, 1971).
41. C.G. Rosberg and J. Nottingham, *The Myth of Mau Mau: Nationalism in Kenya*, (Praeger, New York, 1966).
42. I have elaborated on the question of the categorization of Mau Mau in an article 'Social Banditry: Hobsbawm's model and "Mau Mau" ' in *African Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 1, 1980.
43. Ione Leigh, p. 217.
44. Oginga Odinga, *Not Yet Uhuru,* (Heinemann A.W.S., Nairobi, 1968), p. 123.
45. John Spencer, 'KAU and "Mau Mau": Some Connections", *Some Perspectives on the Mau Mau Movement*, ed. William R. Ochieng and Karim K. Janmohamed. Special issue of Kenya Historical Review, (Vol.5, No 2, 1977), p. 217.
46. M. Tamarkin, 'Mau Mau in Nakuru', Journal of African History, (XVII, 1, 1976), p. 121.
47. Evans, p. 27, and Buijtenhuijs, p. 194.
48. Buijtenhuijs, p. 194. All translations from the French are mine.
49. Barnett, *Aberdare Guerrilla Forces*, p. 67.
50. Buijtenhuijs, p. 327.
51. Ibid., p. 244. Barnett estimates that there were 12–15 thousand forest fighters in the Aberdares and about 5 000 on Mt. Kenya.
52. E.g., Leigh, p. 17; Ruark, *Something of Value*, pp. 289–302.
53. Blundell, *The Times*, 12th December 1952. Quoted Evans, p. 80.
54. Blundell, *So Rough a Wind*, p. 199.
55. Evans, p. 274.
56. *Report to the Secretary of State for the Colonies by the Parliamentary Delegation to Kenya, Jan. 1954*, (Command Paper No 9081, H.M.S.O., London), p. 7.

57. Anthony Clayton, *Counter-Insurgency in Kenya*, (Transafrica Publishers, Nairobi, 1976), p. 38.
58. Evans, p. 233.
59. Clayton, p. 54, reveals that of 1 015 people executed prior to April 1956, 297 were for murder, 337 for unlawful possession of arms and 222 for oath offences.
60. Clayton, p. 1.
61. George Delf, *Jomo Kenyatta,* (Victor Gollancz, London, 1961), p. 156. Both examples.
62. Rosberg and Nottingham, p. 206.
63. J.C. Carothers, *The Psychology of Mau Mau,* (Government Printer, Nairobi, 1954). The 7th Impression carries the caveat on the title page: 'This report is published for information, but has not yet been considered by Government.'
64. Carothers, p. 15.
65. Ibid., p. 5.
66. Ibid., p. 25.
67. Buijtenhuijs, p. 373.
68. Blundell, *So Rough a Wind,* p. 171.
69. Leigh, p. 217.
70. Philip Mitchell, *African Afterthoughts,* p. 260.
71. Philip Goodhart and Ian Henderson, *The Hunt for Kimathi,* (Hamish Hamilton, London, 1958), p. 17.
72. Ruark, *Something of Value,* p. 389.
73. Buijtenhuijs, p. 223. These figures agree with Corfield's.
74. Clayton, p. 54.
75. Rawcliffe, p. 69.
76. Maina-wa-Kinyatti, 'Mau Mau: The Peak of African Political Organization', *Perspectives on the Mau Mau Movement,* p. 297.
77. Leigh, p. 12.
78. Goodhart, p. 17.
79. Buijtenhuijs, pp. 287–8.
80. Clayton, p. 42. See also Barnett and Njama, p. 217.
81. Corfield, p. 205.
82. Buijtenhuijs, p. 216.
83. Barnett, *Aberdare Guerrilla Forces*, p. 61.
84. See, for example, Montague Slater, *The Trial of Jomo Kenyatta,* (Secker & Warburg, London, 1955).
85. John Spencer, p. 214.
86. Bildad Kaggia, *Roots of Freedom,* (E.A.P.H., Nairobi, 1975), p. 113.
87. Leigh, p. 13.
88. Buijtenhuijs, pp. 333–4.
89. Majdalaney, p. 147.
90. Barnett and Njama, p. 137.
91. Quoted by Rosberg and Nottingham, p. 291, who give a detailed account of the land dispute which resulted in the attack (pp. 287–292).
92. *London Sunday Times,* 2nd March, 1953.
93. M.P.K. Sorrenson, *Land Reform in the Kikuyu Country,* (O.U.P., Nairobi, 1967), p. 101.
94. Buijtenhuijs, p. 347.
95. Mitchell, pp. 63–4.
96. Leigh, p. 45.
97. Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya,* (Heinemann A.W.S., London, 1979), p. 223.
98. Ibid.
99. Carothers, p. 14.
100. Rosberg and Nottingham, pp. 245–6.
101. Spencer, pp. 201–6.
102. Kariuki, p. 28.
103. Barnett and Njama, p. 126.
104. Leigh, p. 44.
105. Stoneham, *Mau Mau*, p. 30.
106. Carothers, p. 14.

107. This pamphlet was distributed in at least two different typed and roneoed versions. It carries no name of publisher, place of publication, or date. Its content is essentially the same as the accounts of the oathing ceremonies given by Ione Leigh and also printed as an appendix, considered 'unfit for general publication', to the Report of the 1954 Parliamentary Delegation.
108. Letter from D.L. Barnett to Buijtenhuijs, quoted Buijtenhuijs, p. 294.
109. Amilcar Cabral, 'National Liberation and Culture', *Return to the Source,* (African Information Service, New York, 1973), p. 43.
110. Barnett and Njama, p. 131.
111. Ibid., p. 119.
112. See, for example, Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* (Paladin, London, 1972), pp. 111–144; O. Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban,* (Methuen, London, 1956), pp. 111–127.
113. Buijtenhuijs, p. 264.
114. Leigh, p. 205.
115. Mohamed Mathu, *The Urban Guerrilla,* (Life Histories from the Revolution, Kenya, Mau Mau, 3, L.S.M. Press, Canada, 1973), p. 15.